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On the gender continuum : the stories of transmen

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ON THE GENDER CONTINUUM: THE STORIES OF TRANSMEN

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Communication Studies

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Brian Reed Singer

May 2008

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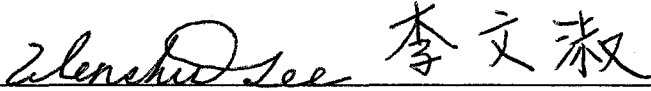
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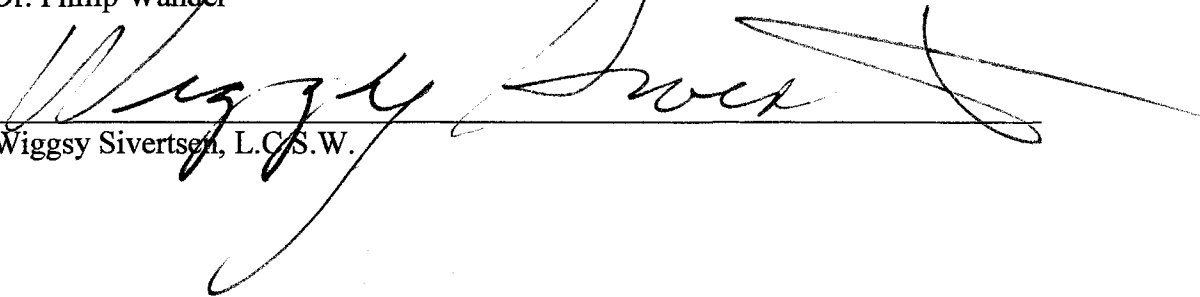
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ABSTRACT

ON THE GENDER CONTINUUM: THE STORIES OF TRANSMEN

by Brian Reed Singer

Much gender research critically examines traditional binary assumptions. This project focuses on transmen, specifically on how female-to-male transgender individuals learn about and communicate who they are, and what social settings and networks provide the most safety and support for their transitioning. Through multiple in-depth interviews, a journal, and participant observation within a female-to-male support group, the author analyzes ways transmen manage and communicate their life experiences. With the completion of this project, the author hopes to add to the voices of transmen who are involved in the ongoing conversation of gender politics and communication research.

DEDICATIONS

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my committee members, Dr. Phil Wander, Wiggys Sivertsen, and Dr. Hanns Hohmann, who spent hours talking with me, editing, and helping me through multiple drafts of this project. Thank you, Dr. Wander, for encouraging me to sing a new song. My most humble and deep felt thanks go to my thesis chairperson, Dr. Wenshu Lee, who helped me never to lose heart but, instead, taught me to prune roses when the world became too much to bear.

I also wish to thank my family for being the amazing people you are. You instilled in me the value of honoring a person's inalienable right to make decisions, however difficult they may be. I am so proud to be your sibling, uncle, and child. Elliott, Max, and Madeline, thank you for giving me so much courage and love. You make the world a wonderful place to be.

I wish also to dedicate this thesis to my loving spouse, Marnie Singer, who made this project possible in so many ways. Thank you for helping me see and believe in myself and my own dignity and worth. I am so grateful that you have been willing to walk by my side through it all and make it seem as simple as a dance. You are my honey, and I love you.

I also wish to thank my friends, my students and colleagues, and most importantly, my trans brothers, for being willing to speak up and share your lives with me. I was able to make this journey only because I was not alone. Thank you for being there and helping me become visible. May you know, too, that you and our transgender children are not alone. May we never live with the burden of silence again.

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CHAPTER 1 -- RESEARCH SITE AND METHODS

I did not start this project knowing I was a transman. In fact, I had only begun to identify myself as gender queer within the previous year. I had identified myself as lesbian for twenty years. It was the only word that was available to me for this sense of difference I felt in comparison with others. From conversations with other people and the literature I encountered in graduate school, I ultimately theorized that I was a female-to-male transperson or transman with the understanding that “transgender” is a politically inclusive term for those who do not fit into traditional understandings and paradigms of gender.

I have been on testosterone for a year as of February 1, 2005, and my body has adapted quite well to it. In fact, I have done better on hormones than many transmen I know. My body was always more angular, lacking the natural curvature of a female body. My public presentation had been coded primarily as male since before puberty. Going on testosterone allowed my body to finish developing and maturing in that direction.

Shulamit Reinharz, the Jacob Potofsky Professor of Sociology at Brandeis University and author of the award-winning book Feminist Methods in Social Research writes, “The researcher begins as an outsider and then changes profoundly during the course of her study” (70). I found that the more I learned about transmen’s experiences, the more I found that mine were like theirs. After learning I was transgender and equipped with a newly found perspective on these experiences, I decided, before my

physical transition actually began, to do my thesis on common transitioning experiences of transmen.

1.1 Feminist Framework

In this section, I will discuss why I have chosen my topic, my standpoint as a researcher, and how I will use feminist methods in my research. Feminist research works out of a person's concrete lived experiences and includes the voices of marginalized groups within the process of inquiry in meaningful ways. Accordingly, sexual and gender minorities have the advantage of standing outside of and analyzing dominant societal structures in ways they are not included in relevant paradigms (Orbe 5).

I take personal and political risk in choosing this topic, using feminist methods, and refusing a detached position as a researcher. Besides being an emergent study, this thesis also marks me as someone who does not conform to hegemonic notions of gender. Ultimately, this study marks me as an "other." Few in the field of communication studies have heard the voice of a transman, and so I feel it is my right and responsibility to speak as one. I believe that doing anything else would be dishonest. Here I find myself echoing the words of Reinharz who writes:

I, for one, feel most satisfied by a stance that acknowledges the researcher's position right up front... I have feminist distrust for research reports that include no statement about the researcher's experience. Reading such reports, I feel that the researcher is hiding from me or does not know how important personal experience is. Such reports seem woefully incomplete and even dishonest (263).

Although I believe that my personal experience and voice contribute positively to this project, there are potential problems. First, I am an educator and have taught for

eighteen years. “All researchers,” writes Bette Kauffman, Head of the Department of Mass Communications at the University of Louisiana at Monroe, “are political subjects. For though the power problem in ethnography has engendered a great deal of self-examination...little of this self-examination deals with the political subjectivities of researchers in terms of gender and sexuality, race, and social class” (188). Being a political subject within this project, I am painfully aware of the political and personal dangers that accompany being a transgender person who would like to return to the world of high school education.

High school cultures are hostile toward sexual and gender minorities. Based on a GLSEN commissioned survey conducted by Harris Interactive, “From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America,” gender expression is the third most common reason for which students are harassed in schools. GLSEN’s National School Climate Survey has also found that transgender students are more vulnerable than their LGB classmates are and are more often the victims of physical attacks.

A survey released by the California Safe Schools Coalition and 4-H Center for Youth Development found that school campuses in California have hostile climates for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) and gender non-conforming people. Two in every three LGBT students reported harassment based on sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation (read: gender-nonconformity), and 47% of LGBT people experienced repeated harassment. In addition, 27% of students reported being harassed because they weren’t “masculine enough” or “feminine enough,” and more than half of all students said their schools are unsafe for boys who aren’t as masculine as other boys.

The Transgender Law Center based in Berkeley California, in its report “Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Youth: Recommendations for Schools” found that 89.5% of transgender students feel unsafe in schools and are at higher risk of dropping out of school and of committing suicide. Frequently, transgender and gender non-conforming people are not addressed by the appropriate pronouns or names. Many transgender and gender non-conforming teachers and students have no access to safe bathrooms. Some are told that they must use bathrooms that do not correspond to their gender identity. Many are harassed in both women’s and men’s restrooms – because they are perceived to be insufficiently feminine or masculine. “For transgender and gender non-conforming people, the lack of safe bathroom access is the most frequent form of discrimination faced but the least acknowledged by policy makers,” the report states (2). Even in San Francisco, many transgender and gender non-conforming people have no safe places to go to the bathroom. One of my early memories of being in San Francisco as an adult preserves this type of experience: While I was exiting the women’s restroom at the Neiman Marcus department store, a woman who was entering shouted, “What do you think you’re doing in a women’s restroom?!” This happened many years before I learned I was transgender.

Teachers and students are often expected to wear clothing that is inconsistent with their gender identity. Additionally, transgender students often feel isolated. Transgender role models are extremely rare in schools. There are no books in schools that teach about transgender and gender non-conforming people. Schools reinforce stereotypical gender

norms. Schools do not teach that there are gender options beyond female and male. Schools subscribe the myth of exclusively two genders.

Although I have more social capital as an adult, the environment continues to be unsafe. In my own life as a California Bay Area teacher, students often called me “He/She” and “Ms. Man.” Students scrawled “Lesbo” and “Gay” on my classroom doors, shattered my car windows, and keyed my car with the word “dyke.” This was often done by my own students who believed they were doing it as an innocent “prank.” LGBT people are demonized, and legal rights are denied in nearly every state.

One reason for my undertaking this project is the hope that I may provide some oppositional information on transgender people to help reduce the stigma that exists. As a researcher and primary subject of my own research, I am willing to take this risk for many reasons. I am a transman. I am also white, partnered, and an educator. A power differential exists between those who do research and those who participate in it, and the credibility of a researcher’s findings depends in part on his/her social standing (Oakley 44). I use my social standing to give voice to a largely silenced category of people. Marjorie DeVault, Sociologist and Professor at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University writes, “The researcher’s purpose, often, is to secure a hearing for respondents who would not otherwise be heard” (75). I hope to help channel these otherwise unknown voices through feminist methods.

I chose feminist methods because I was already involved with the subject. Feminist methods fuse the personal with the political. Ann Oakley, writer and Professor of Sociology and Social Policy at the Institute of Education, University of London,

writes, “Experimental and qualitative ways of knowing are thus fused at ground level, in the everyday experience from which all knowledge comes” (293). Reinharz argues that feminist researchers choose to start from personal experiences for several reasons. It helps to define the research questions, leads to useful sources of data, gains the trust of co-participants in doing the research, and enables us to test our findings in socially and politically meaningful ways. This is especially fitting in communication fields where no ready-made knowledge is available. Researchers who take this view draw on an epistemology of insiderness that sees life and work as intertwined (260).

I realize that using feminist methods is also problematic for this project since feminism is devoted primarily to listening to the voices of women and challenging gender inequality. Though I was female-bodied for forty years of my life, my identity has changed with my hormones. My driver’s license, for example, reads “male.” I make two arguments here on why I have chosen feminist methods. First, feminist research deeply involves questions of identity and difference (Reinharz 3). Two central underlying themes of transitioning men are identity and difference. Secondly, I use feminist methods by default. Though social scientists use feminist methods primarily for the experiences and voices of women, these methods are all I have. No known methods are geared specifically for the experiences of transmen, who were born female and whose identities changed.

Feminist methods help convey the voices of people who are silenced and invisible. Both traditional and feminist methods reinforce this silencing, but feminist methods offer more of a chance for us to hear those voices, at least to some extent.

DeVault adds, “Just as muted sounds are audible but softened, women speak in ways that are limited and shaped by men’s great social power and control, exercised both individually and institutionally” (61). Perhaps eventually we will need methods that transcend feminisms and include transgender experiences and language.

In the article “On Feminizing the Philosophy of Rhetoric,” Molly Meijer Wertheimer, Associate Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences at Penn State Hazleton, writes, “Direct resistant rhetoric is ineffective, even dangerous, while clever, indirect nonconfrontational methods will succeed in gaining the desired end” (5). She named this method “poaching.” In her article, Wertheimer discusses how three women took what they wanted from their received male-dominated rhetorical cultures to make a space from which they could speak and listen from their own experiences as women. She adds, “When those on the margin ‘poach’ from the dominant culture during acts of rhetorical consumption (invention), new meanings are created, cultures are transformed, becoming more useful to more people” (7). Using this idea of poaching, I have chosen to use feminist methods and interchange the words “FTM,” “transgender,” and/or “gender queer” for the words “woman” and “women” and the pronouns “he” and “him” for “she” and “her” or other words, including other personal pronouns that may seem appropriate. I have no choice other than to “queer” feminist methods and literature for this project in this political and personal context.

1.2 *Feminist Methods*

For the purpose of my inquiry, I have decided to engage in a triangulation of methods, including multiple in-depth interviewing, participant observation, and autobiographical writing, all of which follow the principles of feminist methodology discussed earlier. “In-depth interviews are the face-to-face method *par excellence*,” writes A. Oakley (47). “Interviews imitate conversations; they hold out the promise of mutual listening.” Multiple face-to-face conversations help dissolve artificial boundaries between the researcher and the co-participants and help ground knowledge in concrete social contexts and experiences.

I have decided to use multiple in-depth interviewing because it ensures understanding and helps foster respect between those whom I interview and me as the researcher. This is especially important when dealing with such a stigmatized and misunderstood group. Multiple in-depth interviewing helps foster understanding between the interviewer and interviewee. A limitation of feminist interviewing is that even this method cannot guarantee that the interviewee will not be misunderstood or rejected in the research process. There are many differences that go beyond our transgender status, including but not limited to differences of race, ability, class, education, and religion. However, the quality of the interview data and the reliability of the answers are enhanced when the researcher is knowledgeable and integrated into the community under study (Reinharz 25-26). However, interviewing as an insider helps co-participants know that I will not reject their responses and will listen to what they have to say with fair and critical sensitivity.

Feminist interviewing also enables the interviewer and co-participant to create meaning together. This is helpful when trying to make sense of our own transitioning processes, which only we on the inside can truly understand. The process of interviewing empowers both researcher and co-participant and provides a channel for new meanings to emerge.

This emergent data enable much richer results. “The rapport that developed in many interviews resulted in part from my own and my informants’ confidence that my...research and my personal experience together allowed me to comprehend what they had to say in a way that no ‘outsider’ could” (Sara Evans qtd. in Reinharz 27). Oakley also points out that “hierarchy in research produces invalid data; democratic relations, on the other hand, offer a guarantee of validity” (36). More importantly, a believed interviewee is likely to trust the interviewer and thus speak his truth (28). In addition to interviews, I will also use participant observation and autobiography as sources of data.

Participant observation requires that the researcher take an active role in the field. Hilary Graham, Professor of Health Sciences at the University of York, writes, “Feminist fieldwork is predicated upon the active involvement of the researcher in the production of social knowledge through direct participation in and experience of the social realities she [he] is seeking to understand.” Many feminist researchers realize the ethical importance of integrating their lives into their work and of eliminating the distinction between the subject and the object of research. Because this research requires active involvement, we must redefine feminist ethnography to include autobiography. Reinharz argues that the

complete participant approach fits this particular goal (69-70). Feminist ethnography is also consistent with three goals that feminist researchers often mention.

First, ethnography helps to understand the experiences of women [and transmen] from their own points of view. I am the only transman who is present, or rather, identifies myself as being present, in many social contexts, making autobiography even more important to the project's outcome. Audre Lorde, a poet, teacher, and activist, wrote, "I identified myself as a Black Feminist lesbian poet...because if there was one other Black Feminist lesbian poet in isolation somewhere within the reach of my voice, I wanted her to know she was not alone" (*Sister Outsider* 135). For many reasons, the transman remains invisible and unresearched and needs to send out such a message, too.

Secondly, ethnography documents the lives and activities of transmen; and finally, ethnography helps conceptualize transmen's behavior as an expression of social contexts. "Almost all discussions of women [transmen] deal only with what they are in relation to men [non-trans people] in terms of real, ideal or value criteria," Georg Simmel wrote in 1911. "Nobody asks what they are for themselves" (qtd. in Reinharz 52). The study of my personal experiences gathered in a personal journal and reflected in my observations as a participant observer in various social networks will be an attempt to correct that erasure.

1.3 *Pilot Projects*

My pilot projects consisted of two interviews and a reader's workshop I created from a journal I had kept about my personal experiences around my transition to male. I

decided to create this project based on Tretheway's model of pilot studies. Angela Tretheway is Associate Professor of Communication Studies at Arizona State University. The pilot project entailed interviewing and collaborating with friends, two of whom identify as transmen, on a workshop that I could present to the public about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues. I realized that, like many others, I knew least about transgender issues. Frankly, transgender issues both frightened and fascinated me. The word seemed so unsettling and stigmatizing to me when I first confronted the subject, that I did not identify myself as transgender, but rather, "gender queer." I have found this to be true of many transmen. The latter term seemed to have a more dignified and less stigmatized connotation.

I would also like to note that most of the men I interviewed for this particular project are white and middle-class transmen who work primarily in white-collar jobs. I am aware that this reflects only a small minority of people who are transmen. Willy Wilkinson, MPH, is a writer, performer, and public health consultant living in San Francisco, and Prado Gomez is a trans activist in San Francisco. In their article, "Assessing the needs of female-to-male transgendered people of color and their partners," they write, "The FTM community is extremely culturally diverse with varying gender identities and ways of describing themselves" (4). My project only captures a thumbnail sketch of a few transmen living in the South Bay Area. It is a first hand account of what a few transmen experienced in the beginning of their transitions in the hopes that this project may help to enlighten those who have never been exposed to or heard about such experiences.

1.4 Interviews

In the first step of my thesis, I interviewed two acquaintances who identified themselves as transmen, Donald and Simon, whom I met at a local support group for transmen. The names I will use throughout this project are pseudonyms to protect participants' anonymity. Those who were involved in the initial project chose these names to use in the workshop. Simon had been medically transitioning for a year when I first met him, which, for him, meant he had had chest surgery and took hormone therapy.

At the time I met him, Donald was struggling with the very difficult decision whether or not to medically transition. He was a 63-year-old transman who had given birth to two daughters. Because of his age and the stigma that often accompanies transitioning, the decision weighed heavily on Donald.

I had known Simon a year before interviewing him. He was the first transman I ever met, and I felt very nervous around him in the beginning. I wanted to distance myself from him in order not to identify too closely with what he was. I felt ashamed of feeling so intimidated by such a friendly, albeit very quiet and private, person.

As I grew to know him, I found Simon to be friendly and nonthreatening and, indeed, as human as anyone else. We spent time together, met for lunch, and carpoled to the transmen's support group together. Much to my surprise and happiness, over a period of several months, I discovered that my discomfort with Simon had changed to feelings of respect and warmth. I found a friend in Simon. This friendship continues to enrich my life. Reinharz writes of the feminist researcher, "She [He] explicitly rejects the

idea that inquiry begins with the concerns of her [his] discipline. It must, instead, begin with her [his] experience” (259). For transgender males, our social connections are our lifelines.

1.5 Reader’s Workshop

From these initial interviews, I noticed common themes beginning to emerge. These included issues that dealt with transitioning on the job; issues around the use of public restrooms; how transgender males communicate our support to one another, and how nontranspeople communicate their support to us; the very complex and risky decision of whether or not to medically transition; how we negotiate making our transitions known to family members, friends, and co-workers; and similar childhood experiences and traumas, to name only a few. After coding and compiling these notes thematically, I produced a readers’ workshop from them. Using the voices of those I had interviewed, notes from my own journal, and emails, I created a script that participants and I performed in a workshop I produced.

I opened the workshop by asking those in attendance to form a human continuum when thinking about statements such as, “I have climbed trees” and “I always wear earrings.” The statements addressed issues that dealt with gender expression and presentation. This then led into a theoretical discussion on the differences among gender identity, sexual orientation, and gender expression and presentation. Doing this enabled us to unpack gender identity and gender expression and presentation from sexual orientation, since I would show each of these on its own continuum:

1. *Gender Identity:* *Male* ___ *Transgender/gender queer* ___ *Female*
2. *Gender Expression:* *Masculine* _____ *Androgynous* _____ *Feminine*
3. *Sexual orientation:* *Gay/Lesbian* _____ *Bisexual* _____ *Straight*

Although this continuum is extremely simplistic, it did help me unpack gender identity from sexual orientation. Until I could separate my sexual orientation from my gender identity and presentation, I did not know that my gender identity only partially determined and related to sexual orientation. Until this happened, I simply believed I was a “butch lesbian” and in the words of Judith Butler, “did my gender wrong” (Gender Trouble 178).

I also offered an overview of common terms related to transgender issues. The discussion would then segue into the readers’ theater, where volunteers and I would read the words of transmen. This enabled audience members to gain some understanding and some appreciation for the experiences of transgender males. After the reading, I opened the floor for questions and points of clarification.

I produced the workshop in venues that included the Pacific Central District Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association in Berkeley, California, and San José State University. The workshop at San José State University introduced an entire week of lectures, guest visitors, documentaries, and an art exhibit on transgender experiences and research.

I learned from the pilot project that there is much misunderstanding and confusion about transgender people, especially transgender male phenomena. I learned that

transmen have different issues and experiences than male-to-female (hereafter MTF) experiences and that though female-to-male (hereafter FTM) experiences often are subsumed into MTF experiences, it is wrong to do so since the experiences are often vastly different.

I learned from producing the workshop that very little is known and discussed about the FTM transitioning process and that the multiple experiences of transitioning could take far more time than this project will allow. This project only speaks of a select few experiences of transmen, and they are all individual. “Differences exist in socioeconomic status, life-style, sexual identity, marital status, and more, and must be overcome to gain access to the views of a diverse range of women [transmen]” (Reinharz 65). I recognize the danger of oversimplifying very complicated and divergent lives and experiences. This study only touches the surface of the depth and breadth of the diversity of transmen. I was also pleased to learn from doing the reader’s workshop that many people who are not transgender (and some who still, like most of us at one time, do not know or have only begun to question) are very concerned and open to learning about lives and issues of transgender people.

Because little research exists on transmen (Brookey, 1998; Cooks, Leda & Chyng Sun, 2002; Cooper, 2002) and none exists on the transitioning process within the field of communication studies, transmen’s experiences remain invisible and untheorized. Therefore, any knowledge we discover will be emergent. Because I had already interviewed Simon and Don for my pilot project, the next logical step was to begin my

thesis project. For my thesis, I will continue to use interviewing, participant observation, and autobiographical writing.

1.6 Thesis Project

1.6.1 Interviews

I obtained my convenience sample of co-participants when I began attending the transmen's support group at the Billy DeFrank Center in San José, California, in January 2005, and solicited more interviews. For drawing from my study sample, I focused on the Billy DeFrank LGBT Community Center in San José, California. The DeFrank Center was founded in 1981 and serves a large and diverse community that extends from Foster City to Gilroy. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex people of all ages and backgrounds find resources at the Center that are not available elsewhere.

The DeFrank Center offers a wide variety of free or low-cost social activities, support groups, counseling services, and programs for seniors, youth, adults, and families. All support groups are drop-in meetings, so participants are welcome to attend at any time.

The South Bay Transmen Social and Support Group, from which the convenience sample for my research primarily is drawn, is for FTM/Questioning guys and meets the fourth Tuesday of the month, 7:30 p.m.-9 p.m., at the DeFrank Center. Because the meeting from which I have drawn my primary sample is a drop-in support group, attendance fluctuates from month to month. Meetings average from six to ten regular members. Some co-participants of this study have chosen not to attend regularly or have stopped going altogether for various reasons.

Some of the members of this group have chosen to transition medically, through hormones and/or surgery. Some have chosen not to transition medically or are putting off the decision for various emotional and financial reasons. Most consider themselves transmen and/or FTM and identify with the group.

Some of the co-participants include a high school teacher, a recent high school graduate, a free-lance photographer, a minister, and a librarian. Acknowledging the locatedness and partiality in this kind of analysis can move it toward a stronger and more credible kind of truth (DeVault 103).

By the time I reached theoretical saturation, or the point at which no new concepts or categories emerged (Lacey and Luff 11), I had conducted 6-8 in-depth interviews. All co-participants were at various points of transgender identification. Some chose to medically transition, and some did not, for different medical and personal reasons. All interviewees were between the ages of 33-65, and most lived in the Bay Area. One has since moved to Boston. All interviewees lived in the Bay Area at the time the interviews were conducted, and most were middle-class transmen of Western-European descent.

Interviews took place primarily in neutral settings including local coffee shops and restaurants. During the interviews, the following content areas were explored: background information about the person; how he found out that there were others with similar experiences; factors that aided in his decision whether or not to transition; social contexts in which he learned about transgender/transsexual issues; the value of support, and how that support is conveyed; and how identifying and communicating his trans status to others helped and/or hurt him at his job, at school, and in other social contexts.

I usually relinquished control of the interview and allowed the co-participant to lead the conversation in whatever direction he felt most comfortable. Each interviewee gave me permission to tape the conversation. DeVault writes, “Woman-to-woman [FTM to FTM] talk is quite different from talk in mixed groups—because women [FTM] speakers are more likely to listen seriously to each other—and...it affords opportunities for women [transpeople] to speak more fully about their experiences” (62). I wanted to enable the interviewees to feel comfortable and empowered.

When we reached saturation on a particular topic, I would often go to my next question and let the conversation meander. Interviews usually lasted up to two hours. While the interview data collected in this study cannot be replicated, the data are valid, in that they reflect the co-participants’ concerns and experiences. In addition to interviewing, I have also chosen participant observation for my project.

1.6.2 Participant Observation

In addition to conducting interviews, I acted as participant-observer in many social contexts, including the transmen’s support group. I attended and took notes on the support group from January 2005 through April 2006 for the purpose of this project. Other social contexts included but were not limited to the university where I taught and earned my Masters degree; the high school where I coached speech and debate; the church my spouse and I attended, and 12-step groups.

1.6.3 Autobiography

I kept extensive field notes and wrote a personal journal of my own transitioning experiences. My writings spoke of my own feelings about my transitioning process

within various social contexts. A. Lorde said, “I urge each one of us to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives there. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can begin to illuminate all our choices” (Sister Outsider 113). There was no denying that the personal had become political because the physical changes that I experienced due to hormone therapy were undeniable to those around me. I became a man publicly while maintaining my status as educator, high school debate coach, spouse, friend, colleague, sibling, and my parents’ child.

I experienced and communicated my transitioning in many social contexts. I had a rich source of data that I would then need to code, interpret, translate, and write into a thesis.

1.6.4 Data Analysis

I transcribed all interview tapes, painstakingly typing the recorded words from the interviews into my notes for memoing and coding at a later time. This enabled me to capture in some detail how co-participants spoke about matters important to their lives, specifically their transitioning experiences. Oakley writes, “The very process of recopying the [wo]men’s words, reading them with our eyes, typing them with our fingers, remembering the sounds of the voices when the words were first spoken helped us to hear meanings in the words that had previously gone unattended” (48). I wanted the interviewees’ exact words as evidence for readers to catch a glimpse into how they spoke of their lives.

At the heart of grounded theory is the process of constant comparison. I used this method to analyze the data from the interviews, participant observation field notes, and my autobiographical writings. From this analysis, concepts and categories emerged, which I would then compare with data emerging from the next set of tapes and the notes from my personal journal using the process of triangulation. I continued this comparison process, analyzing data from each of my three sources, until I reached saturation. I coded paragraphs of data into themes, which I put on 3" x 5" notecards. As I collected data and more cards, I moved these codes into common themes and then wrote up my data from these cards.

What happens in practice is that data from different sources may conflict. This is what helps make grounded theory rigorous. A. Lacey, Professor of Sociology and current Director of Research and Development Support Unit at the University of Sheffield, and D. Luff, Lecturer in Social Science of Health and Course Director for the undergraduate BMedSci degree programme in Health and Human Sciences at the University of Sheffield, argue that grounded theory is responsive to the situation in which the research is done. There is a continuing search for evidence to disconfirm the emerging theory (12). Oakley argues that taking data from several sources will increase one's chances of being able to establish trustworthy results. The aim is actually verification, not falsification—or both (67).

I searched for thematic concepts and categories, constantly comparing these themes to form the basis of the emerging theory. Memoing continued in parallel with the collection of data, taking notes, and coding. This process of constant comparison

continued until I reached the point of “theoretical saturation,” at which point no new concepts or categories would emerge (Lacey and Luff 11). In this type of research, one assumes that the theory is concealed in the data to be discovered.

The stages for the method of grounded theory look something like this:

- *Open coding (initial familiarization with the data)*
- *Delineation of emergent concepts*
- *Conceptual coding (using emergent concepts)*
- *Refinement of conceptual coding schemes*
- *Clustering of concepts to form analytical categories*
- *Searching for core categories*
- *Core categories lead to identification of core theory* (Lacey and Luff 11)

I began collecting data as soon as the research situation became clear (Lacey and Luff 12). I then collected literature as it became relevant. In an emergent study, constant comparison remains the core process. Like transcription notes and journal entries, literature is treated as data. I accessed the literature as it became relevant. I put relevant literature on note cards as I had done with my other notes and added them to my cards.

The theory is emergent. Glaser suggests two main criteria for judging the adequacy of the emerging theory. First, it fits the situation; and secondly, it helps the people in the given situation to make sense of their experiences and to manage the situation better (Lacey and Luff 13).

I established credibility of the data using peer debriefing (presenting analyses and categories of the data to expert qualitative researchers to clarify and explore the meanings of my findings) and member checks (taking the data back to co-participants to check accuracy of their responses) (Lacey and Luff 13). Reinharz states, “The written text that emerges from the study is a blend of writing about the self, the group studied, and the

methods by which the group was studied” (74). I then wrote my findings into the body and conclusion of my thesis.

CHAPTER 2 -- THE JOURNAL

An early poem:

Trapped
or is it freed?
I stand
between two worlds.
Strange
how differently
men and women
are perceived in this world.
No one notices
when I enter the men's bathroom
but every woman stares or
looks at the bathroom door
to be sure
when they see me.
yet I am more like them
than the other.
Or am I?
I am no longer even sure
of my own name.
I will no longer accept shame
as the answer.
I will travel through both worlds
and learn what so few can--
different sides
of one world.

I wrote that poem in October 2003, more than a year before I started transitioning and before I knew I was transgender. I wrote it after leaving a women's restroom at the Gilroy Outlet Mall. I had felt very embarrassed because as I stood at the sink waiting for my spouse, Mo, women who entered the bathroom would look at me and then check the sign on the door to make sure they were in the right place. "You're in the right place," I

would reassure them as this happened repeatedly. Although Mo and I laughed about it later, I wrote the above poem as a response to my feelings about the incident.

I taught middle school language arts for 15 years before becoming a master's student in the San José State University's Communication Studies Department. My focus was on queer studies. There was no official queer studies program anywhere at San José State University. In fact, until this semester, my advisor was the only professor in communication studies who dealt with queer issues on more than a cursory level. Without a doubt, I was the first FTM anyone in the department had ever known.

All my life I had been asked the question, "Are you a boy or a girl?" As a child, I felt ashamed when people asked this. As an adult, I felt a need to apologize to others when they called me "him" or "sir" because their confusion meant that I was not performing my gender correctly. I cannot say that I felt as though I were a boy. Growing up in Fort Worth, Texas, I conformed to what I was "supposed" to do and be early on. Although I pretended to be male when I was a child, and I wrote stories with me as the male protagonist, I was not consciously aware of being a boy or a girl.

It was not until I began my Master's studies in communication studies that I realized the fault did not lie in my gender performance but in the gender category into which I was expected to fit. With a subtle yet phenomenal shift, as I learned and read more, I came to see gender as a continuum, not two opposite poles. I claimed a space in the middle. When I was sixteen, I took the name "Cori." Twenty years later, I took back my given female name at my sister's request. In graduate school, I chose to be called "Reed," claiming the gender ambiguity of my middle name. I joined Transcendence

Gospel Choir, the world's first transgender gospel choir, where I found people with whom I could identify. I began to identify as gender queer; then I identified myself as transgender. Soon after my experience with the choir, and during the course of my studies, I medically transitioned to male and now live my life as a man, Brian Reed. 2005. The following chapter is about my first seven months of transition, beginning in April 2005 and ending in October 2005. It begins with the first day I begin medical intervention and ends with my leaving the department and returning to teaching and coaching speech and debate at the school where I had coached three years earlier, having fully transitioned.

February 9, 2005

I go to Kaiser San Francisco with my spouse, Mo. We are both nervous. Mo and I do not have to wait long. The doctor (nurse practitioner) is friendly. As soon as we meet, she asks how she can help. Just about everyone in the doctor's office is kind. Mo and I remark on how welcoming the staff seems; we quip that we both want to work there, around such wonderful energy.

The Nurse Practitioner is an out and proud physically non-questioning lesbian woman, so not all lesbian women are uninformed and unsympathetic. She tells us that when she first saw me that she thought I had already started taking testosterone. "You're already so male," she says as though it is a compliment, and in that moment, it is. Then she remarks, "This is an easy one. Do you want to start today?" I am floored. She does not request a letter from a therapist, but we tell her that we have been seeing one for a

few months to prepare us for this moment. For her not to demand some kind of formal letter makes me feel validated.

I think that, from talking to us, Jean figures out that Mo and I have researched the issue thoroughly. After the initial injection, I will go back two weeks later for another injection. Two weeks after that, the medical staff will teach Mo how to administer the injections by herself, in our own home. Jean's professionalism and warmth are a comfort to us and help us feel less overwhelmed and intimidated by what feels like such a monumental decision.

After the first injection, I leave the hospital to put more change in the parking meter. I weep from the hospital all the way to the car. I weep over how easy getting the injection has actually been after all the self questioning, reflection, and self doubt I have gone through over this decision. I weep over how difficult a decision it has been. I weep because I feel as though I have crossed a bridge and made it to the other side, realizing that many others don't. Later, I tell Mo that I think the world should be run by queers and/or queer identified people; they seem to "get it."

April 5, 2005

Tonight is the South Bay transmen support group meeting. I started attending the transmen support group before I decided to medically transition, in February of this year. The South Bay transmen support group is for FTM/Questioning guys and meets at the Billy DeFrank Center in San José once a month. I drive to the meeting with Elliott and Simon. Other members of the group who attend this evening include Carl, Stan, Donald,

Bruce, and Luke. Scott is a high school English teacher; Elliott is a freelance photographer; Simon is a librarian; Bruce is a minister, and Donald is a retired computer software engineer.

The one thing I learn from this meeting is how much identity politics suck. Donald says being partnered with a lesbian is like jumping off a cliff with two weights tied to his feet. I take great offense. Mo, my spouse and biggest defender, is lesbian. In fact, I believe she understands trans issues better than I do. The first woman she was ever with was a transwoman. I find it odd that some guys, once they identify as trans, want to distance themselves from the lesbian community and feminism. I am a feminist. Although I no longer identify as lesbian or female, I identified as lesbian for over 20 years, and I am married to a person who fell in love with me when I was female-bodied.

April 6, 2005

Today is Wednesday, and I teach my public speaking class today. I teach at San José State University after having taught middle school in Redwood City for 15 years. I work as a teaching associate and teach the basic public speaking and debate courses in the communication studies department. I taught here for two years before considering transitioning to male. Deciding to transition has not been easy, and now that my body is physically changing, I have had to use my communication skills to explain to people, particularly my students, what they are clearly witnessing.

Today is Monday, and it is the day I come out to my public speaking class. My voice is deepening to the point that others notice because of the hormone therapy. I

suppose I can lie when they ask me what's wrong with my voice. I could tell them I have a permanent cold, or I could tell them the truth. I opt for honesty. There are no manuals on how to come out to people as trans. For most people, transmen do not exist.

Janelle, another instructor, will visit my room to do my SGID's, which is an evaluation tool we do for one another within the Teaching Associate community, since most are brand new teachers. I haven't yet talked with Janelle about my transitioning, but I have my students, since I saw my students on Wednesday and haven't had the opportunity to speak with Janelle.

While Janelle administers the SGIDS, I will leave the classroom for thirty minutes. I want to say more to my students, tell them more since I have not yet spoken with Janelle. I want to warn them, of what, I am not sure. Will I lose my job, my very livelihood over this? The students know I am medically transitioning; Janelle does not. The students are supportive and understanding. I feel that the faculty and staff in the department will not be so forgiving. There are bound to be problems. I am afraid.

As soon as I get to class, a student asks me how I'm doing. I tell them I will meet with the department chair on Monday about announcing to the faculty that I am medically transitioning. There is no other way; the physical changes are too obvious to be able to hide. The students want to know how the meeting with the department chair, my advisor, the director of the university's counseling department, and my immediate supervisor went. I am a little surprised; they have obviously been thinking about what we talked about on Wednesday. I tell them it had gone fine, that this department surely supports and honors diversity. I then explain to them that Janelle will be in, and I haven't had the

opportunity yet to tell her about my medically transitioning. I remind them that they need to be respectful of that. Janelle walks in and sits down quietly and unnoticed. Shana raises her hand innocently and asks, “So what are your options for surgery?” She’s the student who always seems to want to know more.

What am I supposed to do? I answer honestly. “Some choose to have chest reconstruction; some don’t,” I explain. I gulp. I feel relieved that Mo and I discussed the possibility that I would have difficulties negotiating both the class and Janelle this morning. Mo supports my coming out to my class and suggested I talk to Janelle beforehand. Unfortunately, that is not to be. “So Janelle,” I begin nervously after she sits down, “In the spirit of openness...” I remind her that I identify as transgender. Yes, she knows. I then tell her I am transitioning medically, and that I had told the students on Wednesday. “And by the way,” I interject, “if anyone would like to do this topic for their informative speech...” I add, because being a veteran teacher, I realize that I’m dead if I don’t tie it in with the curriculum. Some teachers argue that teachers’ personal lives and opinions do not belong in the classroom, as if we are able to divorce ourselves from our humanity and humanness while we are teaching. Unfortunately, that doesn’t work for someone who has always presented as gender variant. The questions and the whispering usually come up. “Is she a dyke?” some ask. “It’s kinda weird that you like football,” someone says, and finally, “What’s wrong with your voice?” Tying life lessons in with the curriculum is actually easy to do. What else can I do?

I leave the room. I am dying by then. Will I lose my job for having talked about it? Will she come out of the room screaming? She doesn’t. I run into Paul in the hall.

Besides being a retiring professor in the department, Paul is also a friend and ally. He is very reassuring, reminding me that learning is in deed occurring. Paul has often reminded me that students meet all kinds of people and issues while in college. It is why we call the school a “university.”

When Janelle is done, she comes out and apologizes for using female pronouns, but she hadn’t known. She tells me that the students had defended me, insisting that she not refer to me as “she.” They finally agreed within that half hour session to refer to me simply as “Reed.” Gender is so incredibly important in our culture, and pronouns can really trip us up when we have a situation like mine.

April 9, 2005

A friend, Cecilia, writes Mo and me in support over the pain we feel over not being supported by the church during this transitional time. Mo and I have both been extremely active members, she for thirteen years and I for four. Mo’s ex-husband had been the minister of the church for ten years.

Nearly from the beginning of my transition, the church has moved to ostracize me. Although most are never openly and outwardly hostile, some people whom I had considered friends have ceased talking to me; many stare at me and freely whisper to others about me in front of me. It feels awful. Cecilia emails Mo after being told about the situation. She writes:

Omigod, I remember listening to Reed speak on several occasions during Joys and Concerns, slowly beginning to trust the church, slowly accepting that the image you conveyed about this church was, in fact, true. This makes me want to...what? Throw rocks, I think. This is just flat out

wrong! Reed should be able to count on a supportive faith community as he goes through such an amazing journey.

I then receive an email from Ann, the minister of the church. She writes:

Dear Reed:

Being a Welcoming Congregation doesn't mean the work is done, and it certainly doesn't mean homophobic and transphobic people stop coming through our doors. It doesn't even mean we try to stop them. It means that as a congregation, we have promised to challenge and try to transform them. I wish that we did not have to be vigilant. What cheers me is that everything I know about our church gives me confidence in its will to be so. I wish that no one ever did or said any- thing that made you afraid. I can't make your fear evaporate; I just hope you know you have allies all over church. Trust that they're there.

One problem is that she subsumes gay and lesbian issues under transgender issues, and people know even less and thus, are much more afraid, of transsexuals. She continues:

The people of this church know and love you; they are proud to have supported Mo when she came out (as lesbian), and the two of you when you married. They may not always recognize homophobia and transphobia, but they are open to seeing them. There is a great deal of power to be gathered by treating everyone as if they get it, reminding everyone of our best selves.

One last thing. While I don't ask you to do this, I'm trying to look at the congregational system and not solely at the presenting issue, which is seldom the "real issue." Homophobia and transphobia are a part of this picture, and very real. In addition to speaking up about them, I need to strengthen the systems of the church...I believe if we strengthen those systems, individuals' homophobia will have no force. It will be their problem--which it always is--and we will deal with it pastorally and prophetically.

Reed dear, you're on the cutting edge, and that's a scary place to be. Just know that I, and all the members of Interweave, and many, many others in church, even those who barely know what transgender IS, are right there with you. We won't let the church forget what it means to be a Welcoming Congregation. And anytime you are feeling scared, you can call me. I hope this helps a bit.

I thanked her for her words of wisdom, though, in hindsight, I should have pointed out that there are problems with comparing transgender issues with lesbian and gay issues. I told her that her words help me to believe that the work must, can, and will continue.

April 12, 2005

I meet with Dr. Robin Dea today. Doctor Dea is the Chief of Psychiatry Northern Division at Kaiser Permanente, and we have a great talk. One of my sisters, who lives locally and is extremely angry with me for deciding to transition, has urged me to see a psychiatrist. I want to reassure my family that I have turned over every stone to make sure I have made this decision clearly and with as much information as possible.

One of the first things Dr. Dea asks me is why I came to see her when it is obvious to her that I have so much support. In other words, as far as she can tell, there is nothing wrong with me. In fact, she sees me as a person of deep integrity and courage. She wants to know more about me, especially what gave me the courage to come out as transgender at 41. Once again, I am not given a diagnosis. Throughout this entire journey, I have not been diagnosed with anything, other than being human with human frailties. Having been through the psychiatric system so many times, it is odd that this is the one time that I have not been diagnosed with any type of psychiatric or emotional condition.

I tell her I have the support of a loving partner, a loving family, and the information that had not been available to me until two years ago. My father and my

sister, who lives locally, are not supportive, but my mother, three other sisters, and brother are.¹ I am more fortunate than many. I also believe transitioning is the right thing to do. Dr. Dea says I can keep her phone number and contact her if I ever feel a need to, but it seems to her that I'm on the right track.

I share with her some of the concerns about having to transition publicly at work, at church, etc. She grins and asks, "How strong are you?" She urges me to continue the work of educating others, helping others to understand. Facing the fear of doing so is also an important part of the journey.

I email Mom and family after my visit with Dr. Dea to let them know of my visit with her. My sister, who is angriest over my decision, does not respond. My mother, on the other hand, writes back and says, "Good for you. I'm still having problems talking about you with masculine pronouns and referring to you as my son. When does that become easy?" I tell her I don't know if it ever will. I think practice helps. I email her the following:

Dear Mom,

It's still hard for me, believe it or not. I mean, I've been female bodied for 41 years! It's still hard for me to wrap my brain around. Remember that we're still in the RLT (real life test) stage. Everything we're going through--the discomfort, the fears--are all part of the package.

Love,
Brian

Mo responds to my mother by saying, "How about 'my transitioning FTM offspring'? I have it a bit easier there -- I can say, 'my spouse'!" Mom reminds her that she is talking to Texans. "I try to get away with 'my child' when

¹ A year after this journal was written, my father called from Texas to convey his support and his love. We have since reconciled.

speaking to the uninformed,” Mom says. When I tell my sister, Bev, about Dr. Dea’s support, she emails, “You go, little soldier!”

I took the name Brian when I changed my driver’s license. I wanted a first, middle, and last name, and I wanted to keep the name Reed. The name Brian was the name of the protagonist in every story I ever wrote as a youngster.

April 20, 2005

Tonight is a 12-step meeting. It’s a straight meeting, no other queer-identified people to my knowledge. I get there about 6:45 p.m. I’m responsible for running it for the next six months. Marty asks me if I had come out to all the regulars at the meeting or if I am planning to make an announcement. Her reason is that she doesn’t want me to be hurt by some stupid, unknowing words by someone who doesn’t know. I ask her if she wants me to; she says it is totally up to me.

So, I make an announcement. I say something like, “Thank you for allowing me to secretary this meeting. For the integrity of the group, I must tell you I am a transitioning female-to-male, and I would ask that when referring to me, you use male pronouns.” After the meeting, one of the guys thanks me because he was wondering about it and didn’t know how I wanted to be recognized.

Others tell me that by letting them know what is happening to me, I’m helping them to accept who/what they are more and more. For example, (and not to confuse the two) Charla is bipolar. She needs to come to a place of knowing that she’s an ok human being with this biochemical issue. Rodney hugs me after the meeting. What’s amazing

is that as far as I know, he's straight. Not that gay men are the only ones who can accept me, but I think it's more unusual for a straight man to do so. I continue to be amazed that that isn't always the case. I often make incorrect assumptions about people.

April 22, 2005

Mo has heard repeatedly how people don't want to hear about LGBT issues in the church. One straight guy I've never met, who knows nothing about trans issues, suggests a way to change the church's web page. He says, very offensively:

We mention every sexual persuasion except 'straight'. I don't think it would hurt to add that one word to the list and may make a lot of the members feel more at ease. In addition, I wouldn't say 'and/or transgender,' it really should be 'lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender.'

He doesn't have a clue that a person can be a physically questioning or non-questioning gay, straight, lesbian, or bisexual person. Someone says, tongue in cheek, that according to his way of thinking, we should include "able bodied" on the web site.

Who is this guy, anyway?

I have also been told that others are uncomfortable with my using the men's bathroom at church. At this point, I absolutely withdraw my suggestion to make an open announcement about my transition to the wider church community. With all the complaints, there is no way I would feel safe and respected enough to tell the wider church community about the changes they are obviously witnessing.

Some say, "Well, it's just one homophobic person in the church," but the unfortunate truth is, it isn't just one. I do not feel safe coming out in the church and am seriously considering dropping out for a while. I would like it to be possible for me to

continue with Interweave, which is an LGBT organization that meets at the church but is only loosely affiliated with the church.

What is the old saying about not throwing pearls to swine or not filling old wine sacks with new wine? I suppose the second analogy is nicer. I'd rather avoid the gossiping, the misunderstandings, etc. I'm getting the message in so many ways that this church is full of "nice" people who don't get it and aren't very interested in having it any other way.

So many disturbing things have happened over the last year, the most blatant having occurred in the last several weeks, that I really believe, as do other queer-identified members of the church, that we do not have the right to be called a "welcoming congregation". People have complained that there is too much of a queer presence in the church. People have commented on which bathroom I am choosing to use. People are afraid that the rainbow flag we fly out front may scare families with young children away. I do not feel safe in a church with this much hostility toward its queer members and I believe, in all good consciousness, that any explanation from me about what I am experiencing would not be received well.

Coming out at work is a bit of a no-brainer. They pay my rent and keep food on the table. It's a learning environment, etc. etc. But the church...well, the church is a different story. Some want me to make a public statement to the wider church community during worship service to explain that I am transitioning from female to male. I don't have to do it. Why in the world should I publicly humiliate myself by disclosing my transgender status? Is that what this requires for me to feel comfortable? Must Mo

and I be the ones who do all the work? Why? Who made the rules? I email people who will be attending a District wide church meeting, urging them to attend at least one workshop that deals with issues of either gay and lesbian and/or transgender issues.

April 23, 2005

Mo and I attend District Assembly this weekend, which is the denomination's wider Assembly/Conference. Mo and I have created a workshop on transgender people. Not a single member from our church, other than those few of us who put it on, attend. Their nonsupport is deafening.

When I ask a member of the church why no one attended, he answers, "Well, it may be they think they can talk to you about it later." Only, they never have, whoever "they" are. Anyone in the church I have told I am transitioning has yet to pursue talking to me; I think, in fact, I am avoided like the plague.

My sister, Penny, says it's just going to take time. Penny and I are very close. Next to Mo, she has been my greatest support. She and her children live nearby, and except for the initial anger over having to see me and, perhaps, know me differently, she has used male pronouns and called me "Reed" or "Brian" since the meeting with our counselor in March. Penny told me during that meeting that she believes strongly in calling someone what he/she wishes to be called, and she wanted to be given permission to use male pronouns and call me by my new name. I did, and she has done so ever since. In fact, I never have had to remind her to use male pronouns.

She tells me that even for her, she doesn't know what the result of my transition

will be. What will I ultimately look like? How will having a brother differ from having a sister, especially when it's been the same person? She doesn't know. Yet, therein lies the difference between those who love me and those who do not support me. Penny, Mo, Sammi, and Paul are in the trenches with me, willing to struggle, communicate, and learn with me.

It isn't that the people who are not being supportive are truly unkind or unloving people. They're not. It's just that unequivocal gender is extremely important in our society; traditional gender assumptions are ingrained, and most would rather not deal with experiences casting doubts on these assumptions. They would rather not deal with me, and that is the difference between those who are supportive and those who aren't.

April 24, 2005

I tell Ann, the minister of the church, that I have a right to use the men's bathroom at the church. She says ok, but just know that I'm making a statement when I do. Yeah? So? That's the bathroom I'm supposed to use now. People in church continue to comment about it, though never directly to me. Ann tells me she will be happy to announce my transition for me in church. I keep vacillating between being willing to make the announcement and refusing to do so for reasons of safety and respect. First, Mo and I are going to ask for a meeting of about 20 people we feel closest to within the church to attend and learn about my transitioning.

We will explain to them first. Then, there might be 20 people who will go around referring to me as "he." I can't talk to everyone in the church individually; there's no way. I'm scared. I tell Mo I'm going back to church until after that meeting. But what is

she supposed to do? It's not fair to her. I'm processing this transition all the time, 24/7.

April 26, 2005

So far, feelings among faculty members about my transition are mixed. Sammi, who is my advisor, and Paul are extremely supportive. Some want to be or, at least, say that they do. Others pretend to be and just don't get it or understand me at all. Some do their best to avoid me altogether. The other teaching associates don't seem to be aware that I'm physically transitioning. I'm no longer taking classes, so I don't often see them.

When I changed my name to Reed and let the other teaching associates know I identify as transgender, most just accepted the term without comment or question. Like members of the church, they do not understand, have never known a trans person before, and do not wish to understand. No one has ever asked me anything or discussed my transition with me, even though it is obvious. My best analogy for it is having an elephant in the middle of a room, and no one talks about it. Everyone pretends, as best they can, that it isn't there.

Sammi and Paul have been the most supportive within my department. My relationship with them has also changed since I began transitioning. Sammi and I have been good friends, but there was a period of time when I felt distant from her and sensed distance from her.

Transitioning to male changes relationships. As months have passed and female friends have begun to understand that my identity has changed, the dynamics of our relationships have changed. The question seems to loom: "How does this change our

relationship?” Sammi and I have experienced a time when we have not been as close as we had been. It is as if she has needed her distance to process and rethink our relationship. After this initial amount of time, the people whom I seem to reconnect with are the people I was close to before my transition. I find that I am losing some fair weather friends during my transition, some simply because we no longer travel in the same circles. For instance, I no longer attend women’s meetings, so I’ve lost touch with physically non-questioning women I used to see casually. I have lost my father and a sister.

April 28, 2005

Tonight I attend my 12-step home group. After my 12-step meeting, I share with Marty and Carla (a 70-yr-old devout Catholic), that I’m afraid of what others may think of me. “I’m the most conservative one of the bunch,” Carla reassures me, “and I think you’re great!” Marty and I talk later about how sweet that was. If God is for us, who can be against us? Even better, if love is for us, who can be against us?

May 2, 2005

It is time to come out to the Teaching Associates meeting. Smitty goes with me, which is extremely generous and supportive. Smitty is the head of the counseling department at the university and has been an out and extremely vocal female-bodied person since the early 1960’s. I don’t know if she has ever questioned her physicality, but I believe she has dealt with it on some level because of how incredibly supportive of

transgender people she is. I remember seeing her at Gwen Araujo's memorial service several years ago and being moved by her presence and her words. Smitty said something like, "The people in this room who are not willing to fight for and support people of different gender and sexual status beyond this night have no right to march with the group to the Billy DeFrank Center," or something like that. It was years before I had any understanding that I was transgender, but her words moved me to tears. Smitty once said when I asked why she fights so hard against oppression, "I refuse to live in a world without my rights."

On our way to the meeting, I tell her I've written a statement to give to the attendees of the meeting. She stops me and says, "Wait a minute. If you want them to ask you questions and talk to you, you need to talk to them, not read to them." Scary. What if I don't say everything I need to say? And what to say?

I face the teaching associates who are sitting around the table, watching me in silence, wondering why Smitty is there and what I am about to tell them. I begin timidly with, "From the time I was little people have asked me, 'Are you a boy or a girl?'" I explain that my transitioning will help me align my insides with my looks. Smitty explains that my physical transition is about the essence of who I am, not power, culture, or anything else. But mostly, she just sits as a silent presence while others ask me questions and talk to me, and I to them. Smitty's presence in that room gives me tremendous courage. She has so much influence and respect at the university, and she is such an incredible ally, that I feel reassured.

Laura, one of the associates, asks, "Does this mean you're not a lesbian

anymore?" Another associate, Dana, asks (about gender) and then adds, "I'm beginning to see a gradient of colors." I tell them I always felt like an ugly woman, but I know I'll make a good-looking man. They all laugh, and Laura says, "I see it doesn't really affect who you really are; you're still the same old personality." It actually ends up being a very positive and affirming gathering. Mo and I attend a party the women's spirit group she belongs to at the church has put together. Mo and I have fun, and the other men are great. I truly feel like just one of the guys, and that's how I am treated. It is great and the first time we have ever been seen as a heterosexual couple in a gathering like that.

At the party, Mo touches my chest, the way a woman would her male partner's chest. Later, she shares with me that she could feel more comfortable doing that, since I'm a guy. I am beginning to experience some of the benefits of transitioning. One thing that Mo struggled with in the beginning was whether I would have chest reconstruction surgery. My having breasts (which I now refer to as male boobs or "moobs") made it difficult for her to see me as a man at first. Her feeling comfortable with touching my chest helps us realize we have moved beyond that conflict. Mo has changed from loving me spiritually, emotionally, physically and sexually as female, as gender queer, and now as a man...or perhaps all at the same time. She sees me the way I want to be seen now. Her views, thoughts, language of me have all transitioned with my transition. She is incredibly courageous.

May 5, 2005

A student almost leaves my class over learning that I am transgender. I am honored and pleased that a student who really grappled with a subject that was very difficult for him, one that he had probably never dealt with before, is able to share his struggles around it with me. I appreciate his candor and the opportunity to understand better how others may be dealing with my transition. He disappeared from my class when he first learned I was trans. Later, and after careful reflection, he wrote me this email:

Professor Singer,

I would like to formally apologize for my absence from your class for a week, and explain in part certain reasons for it. With your encouragement of individually learning about the issue of transgenderism, I sought to discover its meaning as pertaining to religion.

This search produced numerous arguments across the spectrum, from both liberal and conservative extremes. Few could claim freedom from bias, fewer still were of a scholarly and objective demeanor; blatant examples of fallacious reasoning and removed-from-context references abounded, and aside from the irony of dealing with it in class, this left nothing but an unclear neutral ground.

The one indisputable thing was its divisive nature. Google aside, even the opinions of people I knew went from acceptance or tolerance to phobia and utter objection. Thus, it has taken a while to come up with a satisfactory resolution to the matter.

What I have been left with is this: while homosexuality or related topics is opposed as an act, and not truly considered a state of mind nor nature of being, the person is of greater importance. As far as academia would go, there is no reason to believe that it has any impact on your ability to teach.

I am not native of California and have not as liberal a background as my classmates, and the issue does not provide the same comfort as would from other professors. Prior, never having encountered this situation before, I had no basis for establishing a position.

Withdrawing from a good class altogether because of it seemed extreme, so I opted for temporary removal until I knew enough. It seems premature in retrospect, perhaps extreme, and I apologize for both this and giving no notice. Concluding, I have the intention of rejoining class and

finishing the semester. Tomorrow, or later today it seems (having just woken up), is the last day of the expert speeches. I have made preparations for it, and hope that it is not yet too late for it.
Martin

P.S. The writing of this has not been the easiest, and no unintentional offenses are intended... good luck with this uneasy time.

I respond to him in an email:

I am incredibly impressed with your words and honesty, Martin. You are truly a good soul. There are many issues, transgenderism being only one, that are extremely complex, divisive, and affect people's lives. My own dealing with this issue has been fraught with deep emotion, very hard decisions, and determination. But I truly believe, as you obviously do, in the inherent worth and dignity of every human being. Again, thank you for your honesty, and I will be happy to see you in class when you return.

Deepest regards,
Reed Singer

Another person, a man from the church, who is probably somewhere in his late 50's, also writes to Mo and me about his experience with my transition. These emails and discussions are rare, informative, and supportive. He writes:

Yes, the pendulum has in deed swung since the '60s and '70s about gender, from essentialist ideas that the two genders are inherently different to the idea that all differences are only socialized. As in everything that can be represented by a pendulum swing, the answer is somewhere in the middle. What the heck IS gender, anyway, and why does it matter? One person's choice to transition rather than remaining in the never-never land of the middle can push all of us to examine these questions.

My hope is that more people in the church will see it as you do--an opportunity to learn more about oneself. Kurt

Mo responds by telling him that she feels his support deeply. Mo has also shared with me that it is difficult when people ask how I am doing with my transition without also asking her. I have more support than she does, and that makes it harder for her.

Then, Kurt's wife writes us. Karina is in her late 50's and has a PhD in sociology.

Here is what she writes:

What I have thought about most (after getting past the fact that change in another person is hard to accept, and bathroom taboos are very strong in our society) is the fact that I personally have no clue as to what it is to be male.

What I mean by this, is that I came to political and social awakening in the late 60s, early 70s, when all the discussion was about social stereotyping, enforced gender roles, etc., and any suggestion that there might actually be some core differences between the sexes was considered heresy. So I assumed that whatever I was was the result of socialization. There was never any discussion of what maleness or femaleness felt like. It was all socialized behavior. In the '60s and '70s, there was also a theme of men as oppressors, which I partly internalized. The bottom line for me, then, is that I have something valuable to learn from you. And learn about myself. And that is, what is it to be male? What is there to be valued in being male? So, thank you for being open about becoming transgender. You have enriched me by helping me start to look at myself. Karina

May 6, 2005

Coming out on the job with the faculty in my department at the university is difficult and a learning experience for us all. I have been using the men's bathroom for a few months, and the faculty, who have until now known me as female, need and deserve to know why I am using the men's room. I can tell that some of the men are very uncomfortable with my being in there. If I come in after they're already there, they tend to stand at the urinals. However, when we go in together, most almost always choose to use a stall. One or two don't care at all, but these are rare.

When I began using the men's restroom, no notable physical changes were taking place. I want and need to explain to the faculty of the communication studies department why I am using the restroom and that I also need them to refer to me with male pronouns

and terms. Most still use female pronouns and terms, and as I transition more to male, that becomes more uncomfortable.

The first thing I've done to facilitate this meeting has been to strategize with my advisor, Sammi; the department chair, Darren; the director of counseling, Smitty; and my immediate supervisor, Darla, some weeks earlier. At this initial meeting, we agreed to make a formal announcement to the tenure-track people at the faculty meeting.

Throughout the entire process, I have felt Sammi's and Smitty's presence and support. In fact, I discovered I was gender queer from literature that Sammi used in her class. She introduced us to Audre Lorde and Leslie Feinberg, and my life changed. There are other reasons for coming out to the faculty.

Some of the students and faculty members call me "Miss Reed" or "Ms. Singer," some "Mr. Singer" or "Reed." Coming out publicly about my transition is a very frightening process. At the faculty meeting, I sit next to Veronica, Sammi, and Marta, who help me feel more courageous and supported. I ask if everyone can see me because I am sitting at the front of the table and the side, and not everyone can. Since my transition, I have relied very heavily on my ability to communicate and teach. I have relied on my ability to communicate more than any other skill I possess. It is vital that I communicate effectively because it is something very few truly understand. I sense vaguely that a couple of faculty members feel very uncomfortable. I notice that they squirm uncomfortably in their seats and will not look at me, even when I adjust my seat so that everyone can. Most are looking at me directly, but one or two refuse.

I start my announcement with, "Since the time I was very little, I have been asked,

‘Are you a boy or a girl?’” Darren, an ex-Mormon, doesn’t really understand but has been as supportive as he knows how to be. One day, we run into each other in the hall. He asks, “So, how’s it going being a man these days?” I know he would never say that to anyone else, but I sense he just feels uncomfortable and at a loss as to what to say.

When Darren asks in the meeting how my transition is going, I explain that out on the streets I’m anonymous now. I am not stared at anymore, which is a strange and freeing feeling. I don’t miss it, that feeling of uniqueness at all. Henri speaks up and thanks me for trusting them.

“With people who know me, they’re ok with it. I mean those who know me well. With those on the periphery, who don’t know me well, it is more difficult. Because they don’t know me and don’t talk to me, they do not understand and remain afraid. If they can, they avoid me,” I explain. That’s why church, I believe, is so difficult. So many of them have seen me, but not known me well, for four years as female. That’s why I hope that meetings like this one might give others the opportunity to know me better. As I collect my things to leave, Janet thanks me a couple of times, which is unusual. She is known to be one of the more conservative members of the faculty.

May 8, 2005

Mo and I visit a church in Aptos. It is Pete’s last Sunday as the minister. He has been there for seven years. He has been seen by most members of his church as a physically non-questioning lesbian woman. He started transitioning six months ago, and the church wouldn’t accept it. Most believed it would be better for him to leave.

Initially, the congregational response toward Pete was welcoming and supportive, which is often the case...until people realize they have to start looking at their own assumptions. Transitioning brings up all kinds of baggage that many aren't ready to face. Pete has been at that church for seven years. He didn't even get a cake.

About six transmen and their spouses and partners attend the service to show support. Jamison Green, a transman; a transwoman, two gender queers, Mo, and I attend the service. When it is time for visitors to announce themselves, Jamison stands up and says, "My name is Jamison Green, and I'm here to wish Pete well." Then his friend follows, and then we all do. "My name's...and I'm here to wish Pete well," we each say in turn, signifying solidarity.

When I talk to Karen, Pete's sweetheart, after the service, I explain how I felt as though the people at church avoid me, etc... She is right with me. It's fascinating how alike our experiences are. People avoid you; you become somewhat subhuman to them. People seem not to know what to say, but it's more than that.

My body is doing well on the hormones. I've been on testosterone for over three months. I love working out, feeling my muscles, especially in my arms, grow. My body feels stronger, my legs, too. I can run faster now, though I'll never be very fast. Testosterone isn't magic; it just makes me feel better. Physically, except for a head cold right now, I'm much better. Happier. Stronger. I feel prickly hairs beginning to grow on my chin. My dicklet is larger, feels even more like a male bulge down there. One way of knowing someone is transgender is how well he or she adapts to the hormones. Because I am transgender, I am adapting well to these physical changes, which is a relief.

May 10, 2005

This week (three months into transitioning) has been the most intense for both Mo and me since I started hormones. We have the church meeting, where Mo and I put our hearts and souls on the line with twenty other people. It feels much like my meeting with the faculty. It is intense.

Then Monday is the gender reader's workshop, which I created. I teach my regular class today, too. After sharing at the transgender panel at the university, both the radio and TV offices want to do a story on me, the only transitioning instructor they know at the university. Someone from both offices interviews me later in my office. I don't know if they are correct in assuming that I am the only transitioning transgender instructor. We remain hidden and isolated, if for no other reason than that we want to remain gainfully employed. Mo and I also attend a forum and art show about transmen here at the university. That's when Mo and I snip at each other, which is rare for us. The stress of dealing with the transition gets to both of us. It's been difficult.

Counseling has helped Mo and me tremendously. Once a week, we drive up to San Francisco to see Ken. For two people who are very proud of their ability to communicate, Mo and I are learning that we do not always communicate well. Most of our problems center on the church. She can't believe the church that she has belonged to for so many years and that claims to be radically inclusive is not being supportive. I often take my anger at the church out on her, trying to convince her that they are not being supportive, and are, in fact, being judgmental.

One Sunday, Mo gives a reflection during the worship service in which she tells

the church they aren't supportive of LGBT people. Though some who hear it are supportive of what she has said, many in attendance tell her that if they want to be berated, they will call her. She, too, is not being given support during this difficult time. One woman even tells her that I talk about it too much. Mo responds that if I had cancer or anything else, I wouldn't be accused of "talking about it too much." I believe I have actually talked about "it" in this woman's presence only once.

May 11, 2005

Transitioning to male from female feels like waking up from a dream. I've been sleeping for many years, and I'm just waking up. In some ways, it feels as though I've just woken up from a nightmare, and I don't remember what the nightmare was about, but I'm relieved I'm finally awake.

May 12, 2005

Why am I announcing my transition, finally, in the 11th hour, to my early morning public speaking class? I can tell the atmosphere in the class is tense. Rumors have been spreading. Apparently, another instructor has told one of my students about my transition, and it has gotten out. I am not certain and can only suspect what the reason is for the discomfort in the class, but I feel that the tension is too high and needs to be dealt with. I have decided, with Paul's assistance, to explain my transitioning to the class. Paul is a retiring professor, perhaps the most senior in the Communication Studies

department. Sammi has suggested that Paul visit my class for support, which Paul and I agree is an excellent idea.

Paul arrives at 8:15, after the students have finished giving their assigned speeches. I sit down on one of the desks and explain as best I can. I tell them I hadn't intended to let them know I was transitioning. I had hoped somehow to avoid it, but with the class losing its cohesiveness, I feel that remaining silent is no longer a viable option.

So how do they respond? Many nod their heads when one or two share that they have been thinking about it all semester. They wish I'd shared it earlier because it hasn't been a secret, as I had originally thought. The physical changes have been too obvious.

One student shares that she is a Christian and attends church five days a week. At one point in the semester, she had wanted to drop my class, but she decided to stay because she thinks I am a good teacher. Another student, Hilda, says, "I'm going to cry, but I like men and women, and I know what my church teaches about people like me."

Reggie, an African American student, says he hopes I know how appreciative they all are about my sharing this. He praises Hilda for her courage. Jorge says he is glad to know what to say when someone comes up to him and says, "Is she crazy?" I explain that often people who don't conform to society's norms are accused of being crazy.

Mike, who is very masculine and has worked out with me at the university's gym, stares straight ahead in uncomfortable silence and says nothing during the entire conversation. I'm sure he will and has been dealing with this in his own way. Paul says it took the cohesiveness of the class up a couple notches.

I show the students the graph of gender and sexual orientation. I explain that some are a mix of ethnicities, Japanese and Mexican, for example. They nod with understanding. "Then why can't we be a mix of gender?" I ask, "or sexual orientation?" I explain that this affects them because they are now informed and potential allies. Some might also have new reason to be haters, I explain. They laugh. It is a good, positive experience.

Reggie says he's never seen an instructor just come out as I did. Yet, after hearing Hilda (whom I had no idea about), I will remember that what I do does make a difference for people like her. She's 18 or 19 years old, and now she knows she can be out. It was life altering, probably for all of us.

May 21, 2005

Will I ever be hired again? Here's what it's like some times. I am looking to be hired once again at Stanford Driving School as a driving instructor, where I taught several summers ago. I was a good instructor. I have four outstanding letters of recommendation from colleagues, principal, and vice principal, all in my former name. Because they are in my former name, I cannot use them without coming out, either to former faculty members or my prospective employer.

May 22, 2005

Sometimes I feel as though other people have no idea what it's like to transition. I'm on a journey that no one I am close with has ever been on. I guess that's the truth:

They can't possibly understand. I think some people think, as in any interviewing process, I should go in and tell my prospective employer that I'm transitioning, no problem. Mo seems to believe that I should simply be honest and up front from the beginning. I, too, think that's best, but I also think it will diminish my chances of being hired.

Mo simply thinks I should be out with everyone. She doesn't understand how difficult it is, that I want to go stealth and pass as a guy. If people see me as transgender, they may see me as a freak. Mo and I have always taken great pride in being out. We certainly felt that way when we appeared as physically non-questioning lesbian women. Are we and do we want to be seen as a straight couple? Will she want to leave me one day if we are? She wonders if I will want to stay with her if we're not. She argues that when others read me as a physically non-questioning female, it is because I am with a physically non-questioning lesbian woman.

I think I want to be seen as a heterosexual couple more than Mo does, since she was in a heterosexual marriage for twenty-four years and often felt trapped within it. She's proud of the fact that I'm queer and that we're queer together. I've been queer and different all my life. I want normalcy, to be seen as queer only when it may be politically strategic to do so. I'm so tired of being the "other!" I also have to whisper to Mo, when we are around others, whether or not it is ok for her to share with others about me. That must be constantly negotiated.

For example, we attend a gathering which features a discussion with another transman. Mo announces proudly that her spouse has been transitioning for six months

that today is an anniversary date for him. I tell her later that I do not appreciate her doing that. I don't feel particularly celebratory of being on testosterone for six months. I tell her that if she wants to share, she should share her own experience. For example, she can say something like, "I'm feeling happy that my spouse is transitioning" instead of saying "This is a day for him to celebrate." I want her to stop talking about me and my transitioning from my vantage point, as though I'm a "show and tell." I'd rather that she share about herself and her own experiences when we both feel safe that we are in an environment where it is acceptable and comfortable to share my trans status.

Negotiating where and when we are safe to be "out" has been difficult, and we're getting better at it. She's learning when it is okay to share about my being trans; I'm learning to speak up and let her know when it isn't.

May 23, 2005

After we have the meeting at the church about my physical transitioning, I write an email thanking those who attended. Two out of the thirty write back. Linda, the first woman I came out to in the church, writes:

I was telling John (her life partner) how much I admired you for being able to not only take on what must be one of the most difficult challenges ever, but for having the courage to share it with some of us. We wish there were something we could say or do that would make things easier for you but I'm afraid all we can do is just tell you that we are here for you and wish you the very best.

Another parishioner, a retired Episcopal priest, also writes his support after the meeting with the church. I only wish their support could be enough to make the church a safe and respectful place in the end, but it simply isn't enough. The priest explains that

he “became able to understand at a feeling level in a way he had not before. It happened in a moment. “Before the meeting” he writes, “I could ‘accept’ in my head; now I feel I can understand with my heart. You enabled a feeling shift for me, one I welcome. It is your feeling that touches mine so now I ‘get it’ in a much deeper way than before. Always remember that we square pegs just have to stick together!”

May 24, 2005

I have not told everyone in my extended family yet of my transition, primarily because there are many whom I am not in contact with and who live out of state. My mother’s sister, Aunt Kate, who lives in upstate New York, is one of those people. It had been difficult for her to attend Mo’s and my wedding in California three years ago, but she did. She finds out from her son, who had visited my mother in Texas, that I am transitioning. As soon as she receives the news, she emails my mother in a panic:

Is it true Cara is undergoing a sex change? If so, why? I thought lesbians liked women. If Cara becomes a man, where does that leave Mo? Please clue me in.
Aunt Kate

A flurry of emails among my mother and her two sisters, Kate and Pat, ensue. Aunt Pat, who has visited us in California two or three times since the beginning of my transition, writes me about how I should approach Aunt Kate.

Dear Reed:

There are a number of people who will just not get it, and if they do begin to get it, will be very uncomfortable with it. Your Aunt Kate is one of those people. I can sense your wanting to turn her (and others) around, sure that if you can just explain what you've always known, what you're feeling and learning about yourself now, they will understand and share your dedication. Sadly, that's not so.

There is a plateau out there where those people sit in comfort, maybe accepting a little bit the idea intellectually, really trying to fit the idea into their concept of what's normal, but ultimately giving in to their gut feelings which tell them it's just not right. I am fortunate. I don't have to deal with the religious-based rightness and wrongness thing. And knowing the genuineness of your feelings makes this right, and accepting the idea for me a fairly uncomplicated matter.

I think your idea of "re-introducing" yourself to friends and family as Reed is a good one. Keep it simple, and from the heart (you know no other way) and keep smiling.

Love,
Aunt Pat

May 28, 2005

My God. How does one describe pain? When we're out on our own, I mean, absolutely on our own, how do we know that what we know is right or true? I visit with Aunt Pat, Uncle Bob, and my oldest sister Penny, and my heart aches. It aches because I'm taking male hormones. It aches because I'm transitioning female to male.

It aches because Penny says when she introduced me as her brother last night, she felt a twinge of anger that she had to do that. I do not want to hurt anyone, and yet, somehow, what I am doing is affecting my family. Perhaps for the negative. Perhaps for the positive. But who's to say?

This generation of family members...those who are alive today...may stay angry and hurt with me, may never understand why I transitioned. I hope that those who come later, my family's descendants, may have more understanding.

What will I be remembered for in my family? How will I be remembered? There will be those who may speak ill of me for years and years to come. I can just hear the conversation play out in my mind. "Reed? Who was he?" One descendant, after looking

at our family genealogy tree, asks. "Oh," a family member of the first descendant responds, "He was that transsexual. You know, the one who had the sex change."

And yet, with a word, a whisper, I could stop it all. Go back into hiding. Sure. Being a gender queer was bad enough, but that's kind of old news now. That may not tarnish me forever. But this. This will for years, generations even, to come. What did he do? He took hormones. Changed pronouns. Had a sex change. Not normal. Not normal.

But once you do something (very similar to having a physically non-questioning partner who is the same sex), it changes the mix. The system that once seemed stable is astir. And you become this "thing," this "third...thing." Hardly even fully human anymore. It feels very strange.

And it makes me think, I can stop now. I can just stop and go back. Not take the hormones. Go back into silence. I mean, so what I looked different. As long as they don't have to see it or know, everyone's happy, right? I mean, I can suffer from oppression and continue to suffer, and as long as I don't stir the system, everything's fine.

At least, I'll go down in our genealogy book as just a person. Maybe the good thing is Aunt Kate is the one who does the genealogy book, and if she doesn't ever get it, I can stay "Cara."

If anyone ever found a mummified version of me, they'd read my body as female. Then, no one in our family lineage could or would read me as a freak. I'm not all that different. But they don't know that. All they know is what they know. They've never been here before, and neither have I. Maybe by seeing my transition, they will learn to

understand and get used to it. Realize it's really who I've been all along and I won't be someone different, some third entity.

June 2, 2005

Five to six people attend tonight's transmen's support group. Donald has just returned from getting his chest reconstruction surgery in New York. Most of the guys there have had theirs done and give me advice on how I might pay for it. One guy suggests I take out a loan.

June 4, 2005

I am living in a no man's land without a gender, or rather, two genders. I am male, and my driver's license reads female. My next step is to get my driver's license and social security card changed. I will also have to apply for a new teaching credential with my male name and ask the school system where I previously taught to change my information. That will help.

July 1, 2005

I go camping with my sister, Penny, and her two sons, Eli and Michael. Sheila, Daniel, and Ricky, friends of the family, meet us for a couple of the days. I ask Sheila to refer to me with male pronouns. "Oh, don't expect me to do that," she says apologetically. "I mean, my kids will tell you. I even get their names confused." Anyway, it doesn't really matter. Whatever.

The second day, we are all in Sheila's car headed for a trail to walk. Earlier that morning, Sheila asked her sons if they had any questions about me. No, they said. They didn't. But when we are in the car, Ricky, who's about seven, which is how old my nephew, Eli, is, asks, "So. Is Reed a boy, or a girl?" Michael, who is ten and the same age as Ricky's older brother says, "A boy." Ricky, after careful reflection, asks, "How can a girl become a boy?" Eli blurts out, very as-a-matter-of-factly, "transgender!" as if to say, "Don't you know? Everybody knows that."

My nephew, Michael, explains, with some pride in his voice because he is confident of the answer, "Reed takes what boys already have, so that his voice will become lower, he'll grow more hair, and his penis will get bigger." I am alternately shocked and pleased. I haven't needed to say anything, and I don't. Michael and Eli get it. They understand, and that's all that matters. That's called "front loading" in educational parlance, which means, if you do enough preparation before a project, the project may very well go forward without a glitch. I was pleased that Penny and Doug have allowed me to prepare them and their children for what has come. It's one of the reasons I love my family so much. By the end of the day, Sheila has started referring to me with male pronouns and calling me "Reed."

July 12, 2005

During my visit back home with my brother and mother, I ask my brother, Chuck, how he feels about my transitioning. His response is that it is easier to tell people his brother built him a basketball court rather than his sister. He also tells me that at first it

scared him, wondering what I would be like. He realizes now it's a very gradual thing, and that who I am, my basic core, has not and will not change.

July 21, 2005

Getting my name changed in San Francisco for the driver's license is no problem. The social security card, which I finally am able to do in Sunnyvale, has been more of an ordeal. When I visit the Sunnyvale office, the guy tells me that he can't do it because of "homeland security." I may be changing my name and gender in order to commit some subversive act of terror against the U.S. I need to have a letter that shows I have had surgery. I tell him I haven't had surgery. I finally give up and walk out after blowing up.

Penny asks why I don't just go to San Francisco and blow Sunnyvale off. But I know it is important for them to know that people like me are here, regardless of how uncomfortable it may be for me. So, I go back. Speaking with the same man, I apologize for having lost my temper. I show him another document from my doctor (he says another reason he can't do it is that the letter is signed by a nurse practitioner and not a doctor, even though she is my primary care physician).

He suggests I talk to his manager when he gets back from lunch, but he is sure the manager will give me the same answer. I agree to wait. I go out to my car to get something, and when I return to the office, I am sent to another clerk. She asks to see what documentation I have, and after looking it over, apologizes for the inconvenience and helps me without any other problems. I am very appreciative and suggest they put

the directions on how to handle this on their web site so people will know. I'd actually love to do some training for agencies but would have no idea how to go about it.

August 17, 2005

I have been transitioning for six months. Every six months, from now and for the rest of my life, I will have my blood levels checked to make sure that my body continues to do well with the hormones. The only problem is that my good cholesterol level is too low, and no matter how much I work out, it hasn't gone up. She suggests I take Niacin. My metabolism has increased tremendously, causing me to be hungry every two to three hours. I'm always sure to have nutritious food on hand. I eat better now than I once did, knowing that it is important that I be as physically healthy as possible. I have been given a great gift, and I want to respect it by taking care of my physical health.

I write a letter to my family, who are scattered throughout the U.S., to give them an update on how Mo and I are doing with the transition:

Dear family:

I've been on testosterone for six months now and am mostly happy. To most people on the street, I am totally anonymous. The challenge rests with people who knew me as female and are having difficulties with my physical transition.

Those who are having the easiest time are those who spend the most time with me. Having been on T for six months, and with much of the official "coming out" I have had to do behind me (and my beloved spouse), I can say I've learned some things that I would like to share that have helped me understand why I chose to transition.

Doctors and researchers are finding more and more that transgenderism begins before birth. There is a great deal that makes up one's gender; it's more than just chromosomes. It's hormones and stuff I don't know and probably can't even pronounce.

I have a theory about what happened to me medically. Around puberty, I did not fully develop as female. I did get a period. But beyond

that, I didn't develop as female. I didn't develop breasts in the way that my four sisters did.

I am one of the few trans guys who doesn't have to bind (which is hide the chest). In fact, chest surgery is usually one of the first things transmen have to do. Not me. Looking at me, you can hardly tell I have anything (never could), and now, after working out for six months, they look like pectoral muscles (or, as Mo's daughter says, "male boobs").
Puny.

I did not develop female distribution of fat in the way that my four sisters did. My body has always been cylindrical, not curvy. My face did not develop into a female's face (Mo was absolutely not the only person who, upon first seeing me, believed me to be male). My mind certainly didn't develop into a female's.

I dreamed of being a boy; I thought like a boy. Cub Scout Kentucky Derby? Sign me up! Chuck said when I saw him in February, "It's a lot easier to tell people my brother built me a basketball court than my sister did." I wrote about being a boy, staying up all night into the wee hours of the morning writing about being a boy. Of course, girls can like Cub Scout Derby, and basketball, and want to play football and wear Dallas Cowboy pajamas and have football team posters pinned to their bedroom walls, but look at the package. The total package.

It's more than social construct; it's also biological. Certainly, in my life this is true. I honestly believe I simply did not develop as female around puberty. I remained in stasis until six months ago.

I remember visiting [my cousin] and running with him in NYC at the time of his wedding. He said to me "You have all your sisters, normal so far as I can see...and then there's you..." or something to that effect. He knew I was different.

Now? Well, one way doctors know if hormones are right for a person is how well that person takes to them. Penny had said at one point she'd hate being on testosterone, or probably wouldn't do well. Of course, she wouldn't. She isn't trans. I enjoy the effects of hormones. I feel like they're manna from heaven, like, why didn't my body get these 41 years ago?

I work out just about every day and really love what I'm seeing. The changes in my body, the bigger biceps, the hair (fortunately, not on my back), the receding hair line, everything. I even love my name: Brian Reed Singer.

Do I like being trans? No. I didn't like being lesbian, either. I never wanted a label or to be different. I wanted desperately to be normal...still do. But I know that is never going to be. I wasn't normal before my transition, and I'm not normal now. At least, not by society's standards, whatever those are.

But do I have a story to share? Yes. And am I strong enough to stand up and be exactly who I am, out and proud? Turns out that I am. One thing that helps me is knowing that others are watching--and some of those "others" are people who are just like me. Rare birds in deed. I am very rare and very special.

Mo's daughter, Mary, who lives in Delaware, is a born again Christian. When Mo told her about my transition, she went to her pastor for advice. He's an old guy, been a pastor and was a missionary for many years. When she told him about me, he said, "Well, I've never heard of this before." He's probably heard of males to females, but females to males? Can females really do that? Anyway, he said he would do some research and get back to her (He didn't know what the Bible said about people like me).

I don't see myself as having had a "sex change." I believe I've always been the sex that I am and the gender that I am. I truly believe that the hormones have simply made me more of what I already am and have always been. I'd also like to say that I'm very fortunate to have the support that I do have from family, friends, and colleagues. I still go to 12-step meetings. I've been sober 22 years (knock on wood). I have a supportive mom, a wonderful life partner who has been with me from the beginning and "gets" it, a loving extended family, and I'm really, we're really, doing okay. I will be teaching public speaking to non-native speakers of English starting next Wednesday at the university where I've been for the last two years, substitute teaching high school, and finishing my thesis. All my paperwork and identity are now male (including my teaching credential; the state had no problem with changing it. It was a formality).

I don't mean to sound like this is or has been easy, for Mo or for me. In many ways, it hasn't. Society continues to be prejudiced, and yes, I do have to still deal with that prejudice (so does Mo). But this is nothing new. I have always been called names, had my car windows smashed, been teased, excluded, etc. because of my gender ambiguity.

But in many ways, it is easier and gets easier every day, primarily because I'm not so ambiguously gendered anymore. I enjoy passing as male 90% of the time; I do not miss people's confusion or stares by strangers. It does make me sad that some people do not, and in some cases, will not understand. Still, for me, things could have been a lot worse. I'm a happy, healthy, and very lucky guy, and I know it. Sorry for making this so long, and thanks for reading.

Brian

September 29, 2005

Ken, Mo's and my counselor, tells us that as far as the rest of the world is concerned, I have finished transitioning. Although I will continue to learn and grow into it both physically and psychologically, officially and as far as others are concerned, I have transitioned, past tense. I am done.

October 2, 2005

Stanford Driving School calls and wants to hire me, by the way. I did tell them I have transitioned. They still want me. I graciously decline. I have just started coaching speech and debate at the school where I was head coach four years ago. Teaching and working in the same place as two different genders is incredibly rare. Most start all over again within new social and professional networks, if a transgender person is fortunate enough to be able to work in a professional environment. I have never doubted for a minute that the fact that I taught for so many years before I transitioned has helped me tremendously. Returning to the same school as a differently gendered person has been a frightening prospect, and I often wonder if I am stark raving mad. Again, it really depends on my ability to communicate and educate well and the reasonableness and grace of those who work and walk in the same circles as I do.

The head coach, Sue, had met me four years ago, too. The students who had known me four years earlier and have met me again as seniors (there are only a few that I know of), had a much easier time. Although Sue accepts me and supports me, she

acknowledges that she is having difficulty using male pronouns and knows that she needs to do so in order to protect me personally and professionally and be respectful.

November 8, 2005

Tonight I attend a 12-step meeting. Sometimes I still feel afraid around people...wondering if I'm truly welcome and safe. It is difficult.

I share that as of November 3, I have gone 22 years without a drink or drug. These are my friends...my friends. Joe nominates me to run the meeting for the next six months. I feel honored, seen, and accepted. After the meeting, Joe and Gary come up to talk with me...and there we are, three men with long-term sobriety just talking. A bit more of my frozen, bitter heart thaws. These are my friends.

Bonnie explains to me after the meeting what my responsibilities will be for running the meeting. We walk through a room of Boy Scouts to get to a supply locker, and I whisper to Bonnie, "And some of them are gay." Later she tells me about a woman she knows who talks badly about gays and lesbians, and she looks like she could be herself. She is very manly, Bonnie explains, with short spiked hair. I suggest she might be struggling with gender and/or sexual orientation issues herself...perhaps is even trans. She then asks me, "Are you planning to go through a change yourself?"

I instantly feel defensive. I answer the way Ken has taught me when people ask how my transition is going: "I'm done with it. I transitioned already," I tell her. I start to pull the driver's license out of my wallet, to show her the "M" on it, to let her know that my transition is over.

She struggles for words then, seeming very confused: “What?” she asks. “No. I was wondering if you were going to become female.” She tells me she had never questioned that I was male; she wanted to know if I was planning to transition to female.

She then looks at me very sincerely and reassuringly says, “You can stop explaining to people now. They won’t even know. And those who do...if they don’t understand or get it, don’t you give them one bit of your energy. You’re just fine the way you are.” I feel such love and support in that moment that I instinctively hug her.

I tell her that sometimes it is important for me to disclose my trans status. She tells me she understands. She is an incest survivor, she tells me, and sometimes she finds it important to disclose when she believes doing so will be helpful. These are my friends. My friends.

November 27, 2005

I get the opportunity to talk to Parthik. He’s a student who knew me as a freshman. I tell him that if he has any questions, any questions at all, no matter how personal, he can feel free to ask me. He pauses, and then says, “I do have a question.” I brace myself, preparing myself for the worst. What might he ask? He then asks, very simply, “Could you please work with two students in LD? I have to go take a test.” Kids are so simple sometimes. Does their lack of judgment, their treating me like a regular person, mean that things are ok? I have no way of knowing, but my sense is that I am safe and respected.

December 1, 2005

Sue treats me to dinner tonight, and I tell her I am worried about her using female pronouns around the students. She tells me that she is glad we are having the conversation. She realizes that she is using the incorrect pronouns every time it comes out of her mouth, but what can she do about it? What can we do? I suggest some kind of a code word every time she slips. Funny thing is, after that conversation, she only slips up a single time; she catches herself immediately, and says, “He.” She doesn’t miss a beat. I have come to know her to be a great friend.

I enjoy not being stared at, and I consider myself much better off in many ways. I’m 42, healthy, fairly good-looking, happily married, with good job prospects and, with the exception of a sister and father, an intact family.

Students who knew me four years ago know me and like me just the same, four years later. I know I have touched the lives of students and other instructors at the university, and I feel good about that. I just can no longer speak up for gender queers or sexual minorities for a few years at any high school, at least until I’m tenured. Others will need to speak for me, and I can still ask questions and find other tools for anti-oppression rhetoric, such as speaking out against racism.

Those in the speech and debate world—other coaches—respect me. Those who knew me four years ago have apparently not told anyone, respecting my right to privacy and respect. I love them even more for it. I’m apparently a good substitute teacher and may be hired full time in the fall.

I have good support, from 12 step groups, a loving spouse, a good counselor, my family, my team and other debate and speech team coaches, my co-teacher and good friend, Sue. I have lucked out with her. I went with the hunch that she would be supportive and have learned that I have made a good decision in trusting her. My transmen support group and Interweave group are also supportive. I have friends.

Some friends I knew and loved from my past I have chosen not to get in contact with again. I may try one day, but words elude me, and I want them to remember me as Cara. That is a true and deeply felt loss.

I've finally left the church. That, too, is a loss. But I keep popping up and have not left completely. Mo may not leave the church at all, after all, hoping that its members may learn and change. I like the new church we have been attending, and I like the minister, but I believe I'm at a place where I may need to take a break from organized religion for a while and assess why I want to go at all.

It isn't where I get my support or my source of spirituality. I want people to think well of me, and there is that deep-seated fear that I am not a good person because I medically transitioned. I, too, suffer from internalized transphobia. Somehow, going to church validates me, but it is also the one place that reminds me that I have made a decision that in the eyes of many is immoral. Funny that breast augmentation isn't considered immoral, but I suppose for some, it may be that.

I would like to get involved and to know men. I am thinking of joining a softball league. I coach speech and debate most weekends, so I enjoy sleeping in and being lazy Sunday mornings. I'm not really looking for anything more right now, other than to

write about my experiences, teach, coach, and go to meetings. I've been through the most difficult year of my life, probably as difficult as the year I lived with Jay before he died of AIDS in 1993. Yes, I think it's been that difficult.

In the upcoming year, I will have a hysterectomy/oophorectomy, so I will not die from a female or male related disease. That suits me. At some point, and surely at least as soon as I receive word that I will work full-time, I will have chest reconstruction. I'm blessed that I have such tiny moobs, but I would like finally to have them removed.

I have loved writing this. It is truly a bittersweet journey. Sometimes I'm sorry that I had to change at all. Sometimes I'm so very happy that I did. I do believe that the payoff is worth it, and I believe that it can only get better from here. It surely cannot get worse, unless I am beaten up or killed, of course. The good thing is that my biggest enemy has been my internalized fears. Certainly, a lot of that has come from the outside and what others think of us. I've internalized all those and what I already had inside me.

But I want to say, too, how very fortunate I am. Lou Gehrig's words keep going through my head: "I'm the luckiest man in the world." The kids in my life, especially those where I have coached and taught high school, my friends, and most of my family, have taught me that I'm beautiful and loveable, just the way I am. They have given me a precious gift, more valuable than all the money in the world. They have taught me and helped me remember that I am a person, worthy of love, respect, safety, and perhaps most importantly, dignity. I think of the words of Jamison Green, who wrote Becoming a Visible Man and who lives his life with such dignity and courage:

Just like anyone else, when transsexual people lie down at night, we know that all we have to live for is to be the best version of our most authentic

self that we can possibly be. For some observers, our journey seems a step outside the boundaries of society; for us, once we find that balance point of self-acceptance, we can experience an inner shift toward a kind of peace. The beacon of that inner peace living in each of us enables transpeople to endure, and once we bring it to the forefront of our lives, the resulting self-assurance will eventually speak to and calm the fears of others.

CHAPTER 3 -- THE INTERVIEWS

I am only one transman among others, some of whom are in the position to tell their stories, and some of whom are not. For this project, I was fortunate and privileged to speak with five other transmen who shared their personal stories of transformation and growth with me. All have pseudonyms for their protection and confidentiality.

I focused primarily on people between the ages of 33-65 who live in the Bay Area for my interviews. Two co-participants, Scott and Brandon, are teachers in local high schools, having taught for ten and fifteen years respectively. Scott is 33, and Brandon is 42. A third, Donald, is retired and spent most of his career as a computer software engineer, helping give birth to the personal computer revolution. He is 63. Simon is 64, works as a librarian in a prestigious university, and is close to retiring. Simon and Donald are parents and gave birth to their children many years before transitioning. Jeremy works as a childcare worker and is in his early thirties. Elliott, also in his early thirties, works as a freelance photographer.

Because most available transgender material deals with transwomen and male cross-dressers, much information on FTM transgender people is lacking or incomplete. No actual statistics on the numbers of cross-dressers, transsexuals, or intersexuals in the world at large exist, so an accurate count cannot be made. It is estimated that the ratio of male-to-females is about 4:1 or more, but that is changing as more FTM transgender and transsexual people become aware of their status (transgender FAQ, 2007).

In interviewing and reflecting on the lives of these people, I am profoundly grateful for the trust they showed me in sharing their personal stories of struggle. All cases involved desperately trying to conform to the standards that society insisted they follow, their inability to do so, and the tremendous courage and risk they took to transform and live authentic lives as transmen, in spite of the dictates of societal norms.

Within the interviews, I found common themes. They included identities and their silences, how transmen finally learn that they are transgender and not physically questioning lesbian women, and the various issues that accompany the process of changing our bodies and outward physical signs to conform to our internal identities and live our lives with dignity and worth. In the first section, I analyze ways that society systematically enforces conformity and silences these voices. My hope is that upon reading this, anyone who is struggling with these same issues may identify and know that they are not alone.

3.1 Identities and Their Silences

For nearly all interviewees, identities have changed as they have grown and learned more—and as they have been able to access more information. Most of these men identified as lesbian before identifying as trans, since lesbian and gay language and markers were all that they had to understand the dissonance between their internal sense of who they were and the bodies they inhabited before transitioning.

In addition to the silences of dominant language and identities, there were other societal forces that silenced them, including institutional authority at home, school, and

work; the physical evidence of their bodies, and a pervasive lack of trans awareness. In this chapter, I hope to unpack each of these obstacles and show how they functioned in these transmen's lives.

3.2 *Dominant Gay and Lesbian Language*

Most didn't know to question their bodies before they transitioned. Apart from everyday or common language, gay and lesbian terminology and understandings contributed to the silencing of identities and suppression of knowledge of themselves as transmen. Social reality did not allow a transgressive person to change physically to accommodate outwardly that person's internal sense of self. Accordingly, transmen worked to suppress their feelings and to change how they dressed to conform to an established gendered script. Changing one's body to match one's feelings and internal sense of self was not an option. The logic becomes, "I'm weird. I like guys' clothes, and I like women; therefore, I must be a lesbian." But there is no unequivocal link between to whom one is attracted and one's sense of self and gender identity. This is the baffling paradox faced by transmen. Brandon stated, "Although I never said I was a boy because I was too ashamed and was very repressed, I felt more male." As I interviewed other transmen, I wondered if some transmen who had not identified as lesbian but as gay did so because only physically non-questioning men could be gay.

I wondered why physically non-questioning men get to be called gay while transmen who felt gay did not. Simon, who is 64 and the only self-identified transgay man of the interviewees, explained that growing up, "I hated girly clothes all along. I

never wanted to show my body or wear a dress. I never dated at all ... it does make you feel different. When I came out as a lesbian, I was already divorced...my sexual sensation had already increased... what I discovered is that I was gay.”

Dominant gay and lesbian language cannot accommodate transgender identities. Gay/lesbian/bisexual terms refer to the objects of attraction rather than self-identity; trans terms refer to one’s own feelings of gender identity. Most of these transmen identified their feelings of confusion over whom and what they were as being lesbian, gay, or bisexual, since these were the terms available to them.

Because of the danger attending deviations from conventional gender assignments in our society, transpeople who pass in the gender they identify with usually come out as lesbian to people with whom they feel safe. Asked how he might know that someone is safe, Elliott said, “Well, I think if they are accepting of gays and lesbians they should be ok. So what I would do is I would let them know I volunteer at a gay and lesbian community center. They can think of me as a gay guy. If they would accept me as a gay guy, maybe they could accept me as a transman.”

Scott is a high school teacher in his mid-thirties. He explained that most identify him as a physically non-questioning lesbian woman within his school, even though he has tried to explain that he is a transman and is straight. Scott has experienced misunderstanding from both students and teachers:

One time, it was the first week of school, and I usually don’t out myself with the freshmen that quickly, because I want to establish some rapport first, and I had a kid just randomly ask me if I had a boyfriend, and I said no, and some smart ass in the back of the room asked, ‘Well then, do you have a girlfriend?’ And I said ‘yeah.’ And his mouth flew open, and he looked floored. I said,

‘Well, did you not want me to answer the question? You did ask it. Is that ok with you?’ And he said, ‘Yeah, we’re cool with lesbians.’

The next day I walked into the room and someone had written, ‘We love lesbians’ on the board. And I just kinda laughed at it. I said, ‘I think I’m going to erase it now because it doesn’t need to be up on my board without explanation.’

Transgender issues are often subsumed under and subordinated to lesbian issues.

When Scott came out as lesbian to his parents eight years ago, they were supportive, but it isn’t something they often discuss. His parents, who do not know he is transgender, still use his female name.

Jeremy reported that he always felt like a person who liked women. “I hated the word ‘lesbian,’” he said. “I was never a lesbian.” Although this was the only language available to him, it never felt that it fit his gender identity.

Elliott said that when he was in high school and in his early twenties, his mother would call his friends and tell them to ask him to stop wearing men’s clothes and persuade him not to act masculine. “They were completely against it; thought it was unnatural. They still call me ‘lesbian.’ They don’t get ‘transman.’ Still call me ‘lesbian’ (laughs uncomfortably).”

Most interviewees dressed as masculine and identified themselves as lesbian or butch because they felt male and, like many physically non-questioning lesbians, preferred male clothes. Elliott added, “And it’s ok to be masculine because I’m butch,” he added. Because they felt male, the transmen I interviewed wore men’s clothes.

3.3 *Conformity of Dress*

Because they wear male or unisex clothing, other people often read them as physically non-questioning lesbian women. However, this only added to their sense of shame. Scott, who spent some time as a drag king, explains that when drag kings dress up, it's about exaggerating masculine qualities (much like drag queens). "When I did drag," he explained, "I didn't want to be a woman dressed in drag; I wanted to be dressed as a man. And I realized that other people (physically non-questioning females) didn't feel the same way. That wasn't their goal. And when I did it, I didn't overdo it; it was like just me trying to pass as a man." For transmen, there is an internal sense of being male, as repressed as it may be. This sets them apart, spiritually and psychologically, from physically non-questioning women who are sexually attracted to other women.

Most co-participants had experienced feeling shame over wanting to wear male clothes. Donald, a transman in his sixties, explained, "I remember going into the store and feeling weird about taking clothes off the guys' racks. I never said anything to anyone...I just started doing it." The co-participants who wore men's clothes also shared similar stories about wearing male underclothing in secret. They were acutely aware that their desire to wear men's clothing did not match the physicality of their bodies. When I asked Donald if he had cross-dressed before identifying as a transman, he explained that he would have felt embarrassed if someone had suggested that his wearing male clothes was cross-dressing. "I was just wearing what looked the best to me and I liked the most," he said, "and by the time I was done, there wasn't a single article of female clothing on my body."

All interviewees had similar stories about how they and others were required to adopt female dress and appearance standards as physicality dictated. The authoritative sanctioning because of their refusal or inability to conform came in forms such as teasing, punishment, and social estrangement. This usually began early in their lives when their parents and other family members tried to enforce social norms of dress. Scott remembered his mother spanking him when he was ten years old for wearing swim trunks instead of a bathing suit, saying, "You can't dress like a boy; you've got breasts." Brandon remembered his mother looking at him with shame and saying, "You look like a boy" after getting his hair cut. All transmen I interviewed had similar stories of how their families enforced gender norms early in the home and punished them physically and/or emotionally for not complying.

They recalled their struggles to dress and conform based on their bodies. Scott reflected on the transgender discussions he has in his freshman literature class:

I usually don't bring it in, but I have this kid who always wants to know random things about me and pipes up with things like, 'So, what are you, basically, a man with a vagina?' I looked at her and said, 'I think you're trying to be offensive, but actually, you're not too far off.' And she said, 'Well, what are you talking about?' And I said, 'Well, I consider myself to be transgender.' And she asked, 'What does that mean?' And we started talking about it.

Interviewees struggled to dress and appear female, in spite of the fact that they felt more comfortable and natural in male clothing. They felt ashamed and personally blamed for the dissonance between their internal identities as male and the physicality of their bodies. They felt the dictates of trying to conform to female dress and behaviors as

their bodies matured, which became increasingly more obvious during puberty and with the onset of secondary female sex characteristics.

3.4 Authority of the Physical Body

Most transmen I interviewed explained that the insistence on conforming to female dress and behavioral norms intensified with the onset of puberty, when differences between how they felt about themselves and their physical bodies grew more pronounced and their feelings of shame more acute. Scott said, “I hated puberty because until then, I was just a little tom boy, minding my own business, doing my own thing with the guys, until that point. And then at that point the guys want to stop hanging out with you because you’re a girl. But I didn’t fit in with the girls because I looked like a boy. So I got tormented.” Part of this torment came as a result of developing female secondary sex characteristics. Enlarged breasts and hips lent weight to society’s claim that physicality determines one’s gender (read: one is a girl based on one’s genitals). This, too, leads to the silencing of transmen.

Elliott, who attended an all-girls’ high school explained, “A bunch of girls, they always teased me...I mean, ‘Why is there this guy in this girls’ class?’ They just know this is somebody that looks like a guy...I was very embarrassed...but I also know the way I am...So I didn’t try to hide.” Jeremy said, “I wasn’t too much into sports, but I always wanted to do the boy things, hang out with the boys. I always liked girls until 12 or 13...and then I found out I was different...after that, my life took a 180.” Simon, who is 64, added, “I felt very much estranged from my girlhood when I was a child. I dated

no one at all. I never dated anyone. I was very much a loner, especially after the age of 12.” The interviewees were all aware of living a double life early on. Each had an awareness of being or feeling male while struggling to silence their internal identities by trying to present as female in order to avoid censure.

Elliott, who attended an exclusively female high school in Taiwan, was forced to wear a uniform that consisted of a blouse and skirt. He remembered how a girl asked him why he was wearing a skirt. “I said because I’m from Scotland, and men from Scotland wear kilts. I rationalized myself. And I would think, ‘Ok, Asian Chinese men wear skirts. Or Scottish guys wear skirts. I’m still a guy. Just because I wear a skirt doesn’t make me a female.” Scott shared that he became more comfortable in high school because he could fit in and date guys. As a transboy in a heterosexual relationship, other students and his teachers read him as a physically non-questioning female, even though he appeared gender queer. He did not possess the language or social support to think of himself as transgender.

Most transmen try to conform in order to fit in with others. Schools enforce these norms. Simon didn’t remember anyone specifically telling him he had to wear girl clothing when he was younger. “I don’t think anyone said, ‘You have to.’ It’s that everybody did.” When Elliott went to Indiana University, he was required to stay in a female dorm, even though he identified as male. “I thought, ok, how do I masquerade myself to fit in so people won’t give me a difficult time? You either live in a girls’ dorm or a guys’ dorm...there’s no other way.”

Transmen also try to conform because they fear the rejection and stigmatization that often accompany being and looking gender variant. When asked what kept him closeted in school and work, Elliott answered, "Fear of rejection. Fear that's communicated...from your family, school...people just don't want to talk to you...they don't want to have anything to do with you...you're already labeled as 'undesirable' just because of this fact" of appearing gender variant. In his classes, Elliott hid out in large freshman classes. "I always tried to hide in the back...and no interactions with teachers...just try to get by...and my grades were mediocre." He permed his hair and wore unisex clothes to fit in better in his new environment. "People talked to me," he said. "And I thought, I wonder if I looked different, would they talk to me? Probably not. If I looked like this (today) in a girls' dorm, I don't think girls are going to talk to me." Scott described his experience of feeling different at his college in Santa Barbara. "I stuck out like a sore thumb there," he explained. "I was a gothic punk rocker, very gender queer. There were lots of sorority girls and fraternity boys and there were Christians. There wasn't any middle ground for anyone who was at all different." Never feeling like he fit in, Scott left Santa Barbara after a year.

Elliott related how an unusually sensitive teacher had treated his gender variance as a child. He explained that everyone in his school in Taiwan was assigned a task of cleaning up some part of the school to learn to serve. "The teacher let me clean the boys' bathroom because if I go in the girls' bathroom, it will look like a little boy in a girls' bathroom...even though we are required to wear skirts, I wore shorts. I always wore

skirts just for the morning...everyone checked in the morning. After that, I just wore shorts all day.”

Another incident involved a transboy student whose typing teacher identified him as male and kept referring to him with male pronouns. Students, on the other hand, addressed her as “she.” He felt extremely embarrassed and didn’t know what to do. Scott, his teacher and the transman who related this story, said, “So what’s he supposed to do? Go up to the teacher and say, ‘You got it wrong, buddy?’ He and I talked about that a lot.” Because the student was not aware of his being a transboy, Scott searched for a sensitive and empowering way to help the boy. Scott decided to speak with the typing teacher.

“‘That’s a girl you have in your class,’” he told her. “‘That’s a ‘she,’” He was passing way before he even knew he was trans.” The teachers made comments when this student began publicly transitioning and changed his name. “Some of the teachers picked up on it and were understanding,” Scott recalled. “Some weren’t.”

Because of Scott’s own experiences and knowledge, the boy had an ally within the school who helped him and his family deal with the student’s transition safely and with respect. Before the boy’s transition, kids in the GSA that Scott organized approached the boy and invited him to join the group. At that point, he identified as gay and not straight, which would have been more accurate. But the only alternative he had was the dominant gay and lesbian language to use for his feelings of difference.

All interviewees in this study had memories of being harassed or feeling uncomfortable because of their gender nonconformity throughout their school years. The

people who seemed to know and understand the least were administrators and teachers. Recently, while sitting in the faculty lounge, I overheard faculty members making fun of transwomen. Most do not know that transmen exist.

Staff members who are gender nonconforming also experience discomfort. Scott reported that it isn't safe for him to transition as a teacher, and he doesn't know if it ever will be. The few faculty members in whom he confides subtly negate his experiences as trans, telling him that he has feminine characteristics. They "reassure" him by telling him he is a physically non-questioning lesbian and not straight. Scott argued that although faculty members are catching on to the possibility of people being lesbian or gay, they lack trans awareness:

They say things like, 'Oh, you might look like a boy, but we know you're a woman' or 'That shirt could be unisex. A man or a woman could wear that; you're still a woman. You're totally motherly toward your kids'....They don't want me to be male. They don't mean harm; they do it mostly because they like me, and they want to reassure me that they're ok with me, but they don't listen. I said a couple times I'm a trans, and they're like, 'Well, you're not transgender. That would mean you'd be transitioning or something.' They're totally fine with my being gay. They are in complete denial of the fact that I'm anything but female.

Though some transmen find it easier to remain in the middle and silence their transgender experience, most struggle with it. "I also have a group of lesbian friends," Scott explained, "and I definitely don't fit in with them. So I'm just kinda...I am in the middle, and maybe that's just how it's going to be. Maybe not." After thinking some more he added, "As I continue my journey, I'll move more to the male side." He pointed out the problems with having lesbian friends and trans friends who are on testosterone, which keeps him on the periphery of either group. Not all gender queers question their

physicality, and some gender queers don't identify as transgender either because they don't question their physicality or are not aware that there are options. They identify as ambiguous, or androgynous, or something else.

Scott brought up another issue. Physically non-questioning lesbian people often do not understand transgender issues. "My trans guy friends don't get why I'm not on T yet. And my lesbian friends don't get why I'd want to be a man....I'm very much in the middle of the spectrum between male and female, and I'm ok with that at this point." The supposition that transmen *must* transition, regardless of individual differences and personal circumstances, adds to their feelings of isolation and rejection.

Because there is more awareness of lesbian/gay/bisexual issues, transmen who remain silenced often are able to maintain a certain, though perhaps limited, amount of acceptance. "People accept me for the most part for who I am, and I don't want to lose that," Scott argued. "I didn't have that for a long time. And trans guys tend to be loners; a lot of trans guys don't want to be identified as trans. They want to meld into the straight guy population, but that doesn't mean there's a lot of community." Simon stated, "I just didn't fit in. That I was totally...I did not relate to other people well. There was a feeling like everybody else had a sense of who they were and what they were doing, and I didn't."

All interviewees struggled to conform to wearing female clothing and acting more female most of their lives, which became more intense starting at puberty. This conformity was enforced by a society that was largely unaware of and, thus, did not understand trans issues. The interviewees felt that there was something wrong with them

because they could not seem to conform to society's standards. Their inability to conform brought isolation and rejection in the forms of harassment and ostracization. The interviewees struggled for most of their lives before they transitioned and/or identified as transmen to appear female, in spite of their desires to be and feel male. All interviewees eventually gave up trying to live double lives.

3.5 *Trans Awareness*

For transmen, strategies of conforming do not work. The transmen I interviewed said that they were exhausted from trying to live inauthentically, trying to get their external clothing and appearance to square with their sense of being male. Elliott described how he finally let go of female clothing. "I was living a double life. It was not being truthful. Every day I worried. So I got rid of the perm. I can't stand it. You know, you can only go through that for so long, and then...you just...can't hold your breath that long anymore." He went on:

Hiding...it's not good for your mental health. I'm not going to be out on television to the entire world, but at least in a work environment, I hope I don't have to pretend...it's very tiring to pretend. I'm amazed that some people...maybe they didn't know...but I've heard about people who've known [that they are transgender] for many years...they just didn't come out...this doctor at Kaiser who just came out...she knew for years...it amazes me that for years you're able to do this [hide]...I'm just not that talented. Camouflage another life for that long.

Donald described how he felt when he bound his chest for the first time. "I cut it up and put it on," he said, "and then there's this moment...I'm looking at myself and I think, I look like a guy, and I like it! I want to look this way!"

Jeremy recalled discovering that he was trans. He wanted to join Transcendence, a transgender gospel choir in San Francisco. He asked the leader of the choir, Ashley, why another gender queer was in the choir. “Ze wasn’t Ze at the time...she was Linda...So Ze...I said, ‘Well, why is Ze in the choir?’ And Ashley said ‘because Ze is gender queer.’ And I said, ‘What’s that?’ And she said, ‘It’s a person who didn’t identify as either male or female.’ And I was like, I thought...Oh, my God...that’s what I am...”

Donald was 63 when he first identified as transgender. His doctor had prescribed testosterone eight months earlier for a health problem. Though he had identified as a physically questioning lesbian for many years, the effects of testosterone were a revelation:

I’m riding on my bicycle...it’s fast; it’s light; and it’s a beautiful day and I’m looking up at the sky, and all of a sudden I got off the path, I jerked the wheel to get back on the path, and the bike flipped, and I smashed up my knee, my shoulder, my elbow, and I couldn’t take showers anymore. I had been taking testosterone for 8 months. I looked down at my legs, and they’re hugely hairy! I’d never really looked at them before. And I thought, ‘Oh, my god! They look just like a man’s!’ And I think, ‘God! I love it!’ There’s this moment, in my gut, where I just go, ‘Oh, my god!’ And in the next, I think, ‘What does this say about me?’

Although transitioning late in life may be unusual, dealing with the internal shame of identifying as trans is not. The question then becomes, how do transmen learn to know and accept that they are transmen? How do they learn that the possibility exists for them to transition as male, allowing their physical bodies to conform to their internal feelings and identities?

3.6 *Learning about Trans Issues*

The transmen I interviewed gained trans awareness through various avenues--meeting other transpeople, taking classes, and accessing different forms of the media, including television, print, and the Internet. Currently, the Internet seems to be the source of choice.

Much of the information centers on MTF transpeople or transwomen, though this is changing. Donald, who is in his early sixties, said he learned about transwomen forty years ago, when he was in his twenties. The transwomen he knew told him that transmen existed, but they didn't know anyone personally. Making matters worse, what he heard about transmen was not helpful, the genital surgeries he heard tales of being especially horrific. "I couldn't see cutting anything up down there when to make something wouldn't work," he said. "That would just look ugly, you know? It just didn't make any sense. So I just thought, well, there's a good thing for them to do, that's viable...but there's nothing for women. Forget that. Put it out of your mind."

Elliott learned about transmen from reading an article in the New Yorker he read several years earlier. The article stressed the pain of surgery and its questionable results. It was not the sort of thing, he concluded, he wanted to do.

Most co-participants of this study had learned about their trans status within the last five years. Scott learned about transmen while taking a lesbian class at the Community College in San Francisco. "I was trying to get phone numbers," he quipped. The instructor brought a transman in to talk with the students. He is still amazed by the experience. "There was this person in the class who was asking the transguy questions,"

he said, “probably dealing with her/his own transgender stuff, and I realized we were alike.” This realization changed his life.

Media also helps educate transmen. Elliott noted that mainstream television is dealing with more lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues. “Look at TV,” he said. “We exist. I mean, when I was in the closet, I’d see these people...I’d watch Ellen and think, ‘Some of us made it!’”

Another avenue of media that is helping to get the word out is the Internet. Jeremy became aware of trans issues while talking to a transwoman in a chat room: “I wasn’t looking at transgender issues...I didn’t know...I didn’t know at the time...I didn’t find out until about two years ago.”

Donald found “FTM Transgender,” a web site for transmen:

I went online and I typed in ‘FTM transgender.’ And I spent two, three, four hours on line just reading and looking at pictures. I found the ‘transitional male’ web site. It’s really good. He’s got dicklet pictures, and I’m looking at these pictures, and I’m thinking, ‘I want mine to look like that...’ And then I find the binders and stuff, and I think, ‘I’ve never let myself see what that would look like if I did that.’

Elliott had never discussed transgender issues with anyone until he found information about being trans on the Internet. “I always wanted to get in touch with people (about the issue),” he said, “but I don’t know why...I don’t know how...so...there’s America Online, and that’s the first time I learned the word ‘Butch.’ From America Online. I mean, I don’t know what it meant. I never learned about it in school. I mean, nobody knows about me in school, right? No one talks about it.” The Internet is the primary support for many transmen, helping them find local support groups, where they often meet other transmen for the first time.

3.7 FTM Support Groups and Transitioning

Because it is often the first time they meet other transmen, attending a support group can be a frightening experience. When asked why he was afraid to go at first, Donald answered, “I was afraid I’d go and find a bunch of gender queers I didn’t have anything in common with, and I found the opposite. Just like me, except younger mostly.” However, after getting over the initial fear, most of the co-participants I talked with found their support group helped them identify as transmen (often publicly) and/or to go through medical transition.

Most co-participants thought support groups offered a venue for meeting others with whom they could relate and to work through issues that accompany public transitioning. “There’s all kinds of support,” Brandon said. “It feels comforting to see people like me....It makes me feel like I’m not the only freak, or whatever...I’m not a freak, but I’m not the only one who’s different.” Often, admiration grows for other transmen who have experienced and overcome societal obstacles. “It turns out I’ve developed respect for FTMs,” Donald remarked. “I think it (medical transitioning) is a difficult choice to make; it takes a lot of courage, and you just have to admire somebody like that. And given that in my own internal space I have nothing but respect for FTMs, then it doesn’t really matter what someone else thinks.” The support transmen find in these groups helps to transform fear and feelings of isolation into pride and mutual respect.

For those who choose medical intervention, transitioning often includes hormones and other interventions such as chest reconstruction surgery and

hysterectomies/oophorectomies. Not all transmen choose to medically transition. Medical transitioning often involves a period of time when their physical changes become public. Transitioning is often equated with “coming out,” but using the term “coming out” is misleading. Using the term for the transman’s experience subsumes trans language and issues under the dominant and better-understood language of physically non-questioning gay and lesbian people.

When gay and lesbian people come out, they remain the same physically. For transgender people, “coming out” is a completely different experience. For them, the experience of “coming out” usually means making the very public decision to transform their bodies and/or their appearance. This is one reason the experience is very different.

3.8 Transitioning vs. Coming Out

Transitioning differs from the process of coming out as gay, lesbian, or bisexual in important ways. For transmen, transitioning refers to the process of changing their bodies to conform to their internal identities as male. For many, this transition lasts for a definite period. Because of the stigma of gender diversity, most transmen experience a period of time when they must physically transition, after which time most hope, when possible, to live and pass full-time as male. After their transitions, transmen negotiate when and with whom to share their trans histories.

Transmen change their outward appearances from female or gender ambiguous to male. Lesbians, gays, and bisexual people who are not transgender do not experience this, and this makes the expression “coming out” misleading. For the transman,

transitioning may or may not involve medical intervention, but it usually includes public changes of personal, legal, and professional markers. In this section, I will look at the issues that relate to transitioning medically and publicly.

3.9 Publicly Transitioning

One issue addressed by the men in support groups deals with the fear of being stigmatized during the period of time when their transitioning becomes obvious. Transmen fear transitioning to a male body will precipitate potential violence and the loss of friends and loved ones. It is the rare transman who does not lose at least one loved one in the midst of his transition. Brandon stated:

I thought maybe it would be ok if I went away for a year or so and did my transition...just come back with a different name. But what I have to do, in reality, is I have to have this public transition where everybody gets to watch me go through this thing and it's so embarrassing, and I don't want to do it.

Other kinds of stigmatization accompany transitioning. "There's this sense," Brandon remarked, "at least in the beginning, that you cross into freakdom. Over time, it dissipates." Donald recalled a situation in which someone read him as male and then apologetically said, "Oh, excuse me, Ma'am," to which Donald responded, "You got it right the first time."

One thing that makes transitioning so public involves switching to the use of male pronouns and names. Transmen have to help friends, family members, colleagues, students, and anyone else whom they know deal with these changes. Simon transitioned in a job where he had been working for fifteen years. He had to ask co-workers to begin

using his male name and male pronouns: “I’ve worked there 15 years. I transitioned on the job, so everyone had to start using male pronouns. I changed departments later because I got a different job...not anything to do with transitioning...but I still work on the same floor. I still see the same people. I’ve known a lot of people there for a long time.” Happily, Simon has found his colleagues to be mostly supportive.

Donald’s concerns with transitioning dealt with age. Scott worried that his parents, whom he is not out to, would not understand and that he would lose the support of his family, friends, colleagues, and students. Two of the transmen I interviewed are married. Two others, Simon and Donald, are parents.

There are also differences between those who transition while still young and those who have established careers and/or are retired when they transition. Scott stated:

It [the support group] was a place for me to meet some trans guys who were older. Because the ones I knew were in their early 20s. And I’m 33. I may look and act like them, but I had different needs. And the support group might be a place where I could ask questions because I couldn’t always ask my friends about my career.

Social and career constraints affect transition. Scott stated, “I have a ten year relationship with co-workers who have known me as female, and I don’t want to leave that job.” The risks of transitioning may be too great. Scott fears that he might lose the bond that he has with his students if he medically transitions. Living gender androgynous, though painful, is less risky than transitioning at this time in his life. “You know, I think kids get it,” he reflected. “They don’t always understand totally. They’ve been socialized to call me ‘Ms.’ That’s what they’ve heard for years. So it’s awkward for them suddenly to use male pronouns when we’re off campus. They get that, but they’re

at least respectful.” Two interviewees have medically transitioned on the job. One transitioned after he had retired, and three have not medically transitioned. Two, though they identify as transmen, remain physically androgynous.

Interviewees experienced various attitudes about their public transitions. “I haven’t had a single negative,” Donald, who is retired and medically transitioned, reported, “unless you could call, ‘Hmm...that’s interesting’ negative.” Brandon described the experience of coming out to coworkers when he began to transition as “putting out little fires when telling individuals...because various people don’t know.” Elliott described the common experience of working for a man who had never known a transperson. “He was very supportive of it. He was a doctor...osteopath. He had never met anyone like me before, and he was supportive. He knew. His wife knew. I know his family...they’re all very supportive.”

Outside support seemed to help family members accept the transition. Elliott’s brother, who was initially very angry about the transition, found a friend who helped him with his brother’s transition. He stated:

After he went to graduate school, he opened his eyes to...the fact that there are people out there like me in higher education...we are not all weird, failure of society, fringe people...She was friendly to talk to. He needed someone to talk to, and his mind turned around.

Elliott added that the friend who helped his brother was a physically non-questioning lesbian. Brandon asked his six-year-old nephew whether he would like to refer to him as his uncle or his aunt. The nephew replied matter-of-factly, “My uncle.”

3.10 Medical Interventions

Some interviewees did not opt for a medical transition because they feared social reprisals from jobs and/or loved ones, were able to pass as male most of the time, or feared the side effects of hormones. Simon stated, “What’s scary is the unknown. My fears are...will I get cancer? Will I be more prone to cancer if I take the hormones?”

Elliott felt that he didn’t need medical intervention to help him pass:

I don’t really need to because my voice is already low...and I’m not really fond of growing a mustache because it really makes me look criminal. I tried...I trimmed the hair and put it on my face, to see what I would look like...that’s what I always wanted to grow...(struggles for the word beard). That’s what I always wanted...and I don’t look good in it,

So I decided I don’t need to grow one. Because my friend told me, if I shaved, one would grow in, so I tried to shave. But I didn’t grow...I didn’t grow. It was funny...thinking about the teenage years, trying to grow the facial hair, and all these things.

Others feared how they would look afterwards. Scott stated, “I guess I’m jealous of my trans friends, because I think they’re beautiful. I’m a little concerned about myself because the older you are, the less fully you transition. I’ll be 5’2, fat and balding. My brother is balding.” He also still considered the possibility of having children, since he was only 32. Some are also afraid of potential complications with surgery.

Two of the co-participants, Simon and Donald, had grown children when they decided to transition. Their children wanted to know whether or not they would still be able to call their parent “Mom” after they medically transitioned. Both told their children that they could call them anything they wanted. Simon added, “I still am a mom...to my children, I am still a mom.”

Both admitted that their children's responses and opinions about their transitions mattered. Donald remarked:

I told them, before I completely made up my mind (to take the injections, proceed with chest surgery, etc.). You know, it's kind of a factor, and it would help me in seeing how strongly they reacted to it. And, they were both negative at first, but it wasn't all that bad. And, like a week later, one of them was completely ok with it, and the other one was saying she was ok with it, but I could tell she was a little bit uptight.

As the medical transition progresses, transmen often become less gender androgynous and pass more easily as male. Most co-participants thought that being gender unambiguous helped with their social, family, and work relationships. They claim that living full-time as male has increased their self-esteem. The conflict between internal feelings and external appearance drops, and this brings relief.

3.11 Benefits of Transitioning

Simon believes that his transition gave him a deeper sense of who he is. "I'm a person. I am this person. It's a nice feeling." Brandon agreed: "It's hard to say, when you were born female, 'I'm a man.' It becomes easier because now that I'm transitioning, I'm more comfortable with it. It's easier to say I'm a man; it's easier to use male pronouns, but that is a process, too. I'm still a mix." Although Elliott had no medical intervention, he changed his name and clothes to male full time. He also feels the change was positive:

My boss knew, so I knew he was accepting of me. And it made me feel good about myself, being accepted. I mean, the patients didn't know; I didn't really care. I would like my friends to know...so I don't have to wait for the other shoe to drop. When you pass as a genetic guy and people don't know, you don't know how they're going to react. For me,

it's like waiting for the other shoe to drop. I mean, you can't be sure they're going to be real friends unless they know. But if you tell them, you might lose this comfortable social acquaintance. You do have to hang out with friends, but they might not want to hang out with you. You might not be so popular in class anymore. After I passed as a guy, I did better. Socially better as well. In my evening class (college), I passed as a guy full time, no more girls' dorm ...so I was pretty popular in class, girls paid attention to me, teachers liked me. I was doing well; I learned art. After my junior year, I cut my hair, I was happier, and I had a girl friend, and life was better for me. Though I still don't know how I'm going to work in society [as trans]...

Most transmen who transitioned were glad they had lived female-bodied. "I would have lost out on a lot of experiences had I done it when I was much younger," Scott remarked. "If we had just come out as trans, we may not have had as much sensitivity to LGBT issues. It gave us more sensitivity than if we had just come out as trans and seen ourselves as guys." Elliott pointed out, "Being in between sucks. My therapist says maybe we are generations ahead. There has to be something good about us, as well. We get to learn how it is to be female and how it is to be a man; it's transformative." Transitioning gives one a unique perspective on being female and male.

Transitioning among those who are safe and aware helps transpeople and others accept differences. For most transmen, the public transition lasts for two to three years. Some claim that it takes up to five years to complete the social and physical transition fully. "It's less of a big issue if we respond to people like it's no big deal," Jeremy reflected. "Then they tend to act as if it's no big deal. For example, they had always wondered if I were a boy or a girl, weren't sure, and now it's cool." Being honest about who we are also helps others become more sensitive to trans issues. Armed with this knowledge, transmen and those who know them are better equipped to communicate and

stand up to oppression and violence against those whom society deems freakish, weird, or just different.

CHAPTER 4 -- THE AWAKENING: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

“Certain lives will be highly protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilize the forces of war. And other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as ‘grieveable’” (Butler, Undoing Gender 24).

“How old were you when you first realized you were a frog, Mr. Green? How did your parents react when you told them you were a frog? Do you date? Do you tell your partners you’re a frog? So, how does it work? I mean, uh, can you, like, do it?” (Green, "Look! No, Don't!" 118)

I cannot remember how I ended up in the hospital. I was 33. My words sent me there, words about feelings I could not understand, much less express. The feelings of there being something wrong had returned. “What we need to understand, and why female-to-male visibility is necessary in order to bring the point home,” Green writes, “is that what we experience is not something *wrong*, but something *different*” (Visible Man 7). I would try to share with someone that I felt there was something wrong with me, something, perhaps, even bad or evil. I had accepted I was lesbian years earlier. Why hadn’t that solved the problem? I liked girls. I wore and preferred men’s clothes.

Everyone who knew me knew I was different, which I always equated with being wrong. “Others...have lived a life so full of fear and isolation that they are no longer even able to reach out,” Lorde writes. “They have lost their hope. There are many trapped by their fear into silence and invisibility and they exist in a dim valley of terror wearing nooses of conformity...conformity is very seductive, as it is destructive, and can

be a terrible and painful prison” (Gay Insurgent 13). My cousin’s words still haunt me: “There were your four sisters, normal, as far as I could see. And then there was you.”

4.1 *Melancholy of Otherness*

I had always felt so lonely. Ah, the loneliness. Alcohol comforted me, and then even that betrayed me. Sobriety did help; it did. But after I got sober, I was still lonely, and there was still something that felt terribly wrong. I wanted to match that mythical norm, whatever that was. “Somewhere on the edge of consciousness,” Lorde writes, “there is what I call a *mythical norm*, which each one of us within our hearts knows ‘that is not me’” (Sister Outsider 116). I volunteered to be locked up in a 90-hour hold, but I didn’t really want to die. I wanted the sadness, the terrible melancholy ache, to stop.

Penny is sitting at the table with me, the monster, in hospital gown. I felt safe with her. I didn’t have to look at what I didn’t know what to look at anyway. No one, least of all therapists and doctors, knew what was wrong. I was so near giving up.

Boye, an Asian priest and patient, was in the hospital with me at the time. “Boye,” I asked him, “Does God love me, too?” “The way you get people to testify against themselves is not to have police tactics and oppressive techniques,” Lorde writes. “What you do is to build it in so people learn to distrust everything in themselves that has not been sanctioned, to reject what is most creative in themselves to begin with, so you don’t even need to stamp it out” (Sister Outsider 102). I sat at the table with Penny, the person who was closer to me than anyone else in the world, and Dani, someone whom I had seen for a time, but she was wise enough to know we weren’t in love. I remember

Dani looked great wearing guys' clothes. I loved that about her. She let me know that wearing guys' clothes was okay.

I had felt such shame for not being able to conform to a male-female society. "All my life, my non-traditional gender had been my biggest secret, my deepest shame," Bornstein writes. "It's not that I didn't want to talk about this with someone, it's just that I never saw anything in the culture that encouraged me to talk about my feeling that I was the wrong gender" (8). I think I knew even then—as early as 16—that I didn't conform and was ostracized for it. "What's wrong with you?" I would constantly ask myself, but I wouldn't know. "The Third Persona... refers to being negated," Wander writes. "But 'being negated' includes not only being alienated through language—the 'it' that is the summation of all that you and I are told to avoid becoming, but also being negated in history, a being whose presence, though relevant to what is said, is negated through silence" (210). It was a constant melancholy, a constant ache, an ache without words or definition.

I sat with Penny and Dani and told them that I suspected there was something wrong with me. What I remembered most was the baffled expression on Penny's face. "What do you *mean* something is wrong with you?" She asked, trying desperately to understand what I meant. She wanted to help. I was more baffled than anyone was. I didn't know. Something. Something that didn't add up, didn't make sense, could not be articulated, and didn't even exist. "I had no words to say who that self was," Green writes. "I had no words to tell them that I was trying hard to be who they wanted me to be, but it just didn't feel right" (11). Somewhere around that time a psychiatrist, Dr. Fry,

said, “You are a man in a woman’s body.” What he said seemed ridiculous and did not fit my experience. “Many female-bodied people do not and have never felt like ‘a man trapped in a woman’s body’ or as though they have ‘the wrong body’” (Cromwell 25). Later, Penny and I laughed about what he had said. “I’m your brother,” I’d tell her, and we’d both laugh. How little I knew how close I was to the truth, but the language he used did not help me get nearer to understanding. “It [transsexualism or GID] is a diagnosis that has been given to people against their will, and it is a diagnosis that has effectively broken the will of many people, especially queer and trans youth” (Butler, Undoing Gender 77). I just felt crazy, and deeply sad.

So here I sit today, as Brian, looking back at what happened to me so many years ago. How many years? Before Mo was even a dream. Maybe ten years ago? I suffered alone with something that many in the psychiatric field still don’t talk about or even know about. “Audiences have rarely seen the real faces of the transgendered,” Butler writes. “They don’t hear our voices, rarely read our words. For too many years, we transgendered people have been playing a hiding game” (Undoing Gender 60). Surely, I’m not the only one who’s ever nearly stepped off the edge of life over this? Surely, I’m not the only one. I’ve learned that there are others, but we are so hidden, so silent, so shamed into silence. We have a huge and terrible secret. “I kept myself through feeling,” Lorde writes. “I lived through it. And at such a subterranean level that I didn’t know how to talk” (Sister Outsider 103). We think that something is wrong with us; many don’t yet know there is nothing wrong with us.

I didn't even know that yet, fully. I was still coming out of being wrong. I remember attending a summer class on teaching speech and debate in 1989. Two women I had befriended, colleagues in the class, saw me come to some engagement in a dress. One said, with some semblance of relief, "We were wondering about you." Seeing me in a dress confirmed that I was somehow acceptable. "Language...exists as a possibility for being in the world. The persona frozen in language and commended through discourse," Wander writes, "because it gives human shape to things and because it may entail significant behavior, becomes the proper subject...for moral judgment" (209). I had tried to conform to being a girl, as my body (which very few had ever seen, oddly enough) dictated.

Penny, it is quiet now. Have you noticed how quiet life has become? Have you noticed the voices have dissipated? You can go on about your life and not worry quite so much. You can live your life now, knowing I'm coming through, perhaps have come through, so much of the darkness. My God. The darkness was like jet-black soup.

I sit there, imagining looking back at Penny, Dani, and myself. We are having a conversation. I feel such love, not only for myself in my hospital ordered robe and laceless slippers, but Penny and Dani, too. Because I was Penny's sibling, her loved one, and I'm angry that society has us in such a stronghold that it is capable of ripping loved ones from our very lives, our very existence. And sometimes we don't even know why. I could have died, and no one would ever have known why.

The only language I had was the language of being gay or lesbian. "Sexuality is not only related to gender but blends easily, and is often conflated with it," Cromwell

writes. “That conflation arises because of our own folk beliefs that sex causes gender...and gender causes sex” (37). Few understand or realize that what the transmen experience relates to their gender and basic sense of identity and not the objects of their attraction. “It was like, you were in the hospital, you know...and it all made sense,” Penny said several years later. “I *understood* why...what kind of person you were, the choices you made, why the things you did were so different from the rest of us...the choices you made about the way you dressed, and the choices you made about your life, and the way you didn’t *quite* fit in...Then it was like, ‘Oh, wow. That makes sense.’” Identity is so basic to our beingness that if we don’t get that lesson, we’re going to feel very lost and confused. “If we don’t find a point of comfort or balance between our gender identity and our social interactions,” Green writes, “no matter who we are, we won’t be able to find peace in any aspect of our lives” (Visible Man 9).

I was subbing for a class the other day. We had a guest visitor from DeVry Institute (an institute that offers technology courses to undergraduate students). The visitor instructed the students to fill out a form that asked them to identify their gender. She said with a smirk, “Everyone should know whether you’re a girl or a boy by now,” implying, of course a few things: Gender is so important that it should go without saying—gender is assumed, believing that it is easily determined by looking at the body only (or assuming what the body must look like). There is no diversity in gender. You’re either one or the other, and if you don’t know or aren’t sure, there is something wrong with you. “What makes my own life bearable? What makes, or ought to make, the lives of others bearable? Somewhere in the answer we find ourselves not only

committed to a certain view of what life is, and what it should be, but also of what constitutes the human, the distinctively human, and what does not” (Butler, Undoing Gender 17). These messages occur within our social contexts daily.

We get these messages very early. “Categorizing people by sex is both a legal and a medical matter in which bodies are made legitimate and normal depending on what genitals they possess,” Cromwell notes. “Sex ambiguities are not tolerated because they upset the status quo of dichotomous sexes” (36). No wonder you’re not going to say and not going to know if you didn’t get the message. Most people believe that gender has to do with body parts. “Sexuality is not only related to gender but blends easily, and is often conflated with it” (Cromwell 36). For intelligent people, it would be unthinkable not to know what one’s gender is.

The person that I was looks up and notices that I’ve sat down. “How come I’m the only one here dealing with this, if I’m not crazy?”

Oh, there are others, I tell you. I’m not sure, but I think there are others here in this hospital with you. But, like you, they just don’t know, or they’re not saying. Or the ache is so low grade, just a low-grade melancholy, that, like you, they are able to function for the most part. You met one at the Veterans’ Hospital; I can’t remember which hospitalization that was. He had aborted his transition, and something both attracted you to and repelled you from him. When a band came to play and the patients were escorted to the concert, you even danced with him.

You will meet people later who have been hospitalized and have suffered from terrible things, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual abuse, and prison. They’re there; you just

don't see them yet. "We are told in words and not in words, we are told by their deafness, by their stone ears, that our experience,...is not valuable," Lorde writes, "therefore not valuable to society, to humanity" (Sister Outsider 7). In many ways, your having been sheltered has not helped you.

So what have I learned? I settle in and start again. You remained hidden out of shame, too. Don't ever forget the shame you felt. As I transition, I no longer feel that shame I felt for so many years because the man that I am is finally becoming visible. "We fear the visibility without which we cannot truly live," Lorde writes, "and that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength" (Sister Outsider 42). My transition has given me a new strength and empowerment.

Gender is assumed. Wander writes, "[I]deology, even when intentional, is sometimes possible only when those in power do not or cannot identify it as such" (214). We do what we can to conform to the standard norm. You did that, but it felt wrong and made you very very angry. You weren't wrong. Trying to wear female clothes; perming your hair, and others negating you for not doing it well was wrong. "As children, many future transmen are not capable of behaving the way other little girls do. We are teased and tormented by our classmates (and sometimes by our own families) because the masculine gender signals we express conflict with the female clothing we are forced to wear. Try as we might to please the adults around us or be accepted by our peers, we are constantly aware of our inability to be who they want us to be" (Green, Visible Man 204). This inability to conform brought terrible pain and guilt.

You internalized this inability to conform as shame, and not understanding or even being able to verbalize the problem, the underlying, ever present melancholy, you felt wrong. “It is nearly impossible to reconstruct and make transpeople fit who neither want nor feel the need to be reconstructed or fit within a particular category,” Cromwell says. “Certainly, the latter are sanctioned, disciplined, or punished as gender transgressors, usually by labeling their identities and behaviors as pathological and disordered” (37). Do you remember shouting at the top of your lungs when you were sixteen years old, “I refuse to conform to a boy/girl society!” before slamming your bedroom door? You paid for it. It seems unbelievable that I was so aware of feeling compelled to conform at such a young age.

You felt like a monster, so you let them lock you up. That’s what Western society does with animals and things they fear; it’s in our culture. “What is negated through the Second Persona forms the silhouette of a Third Persona...the ‘it’ that is not present, that is objectified in a way that ‘you’ and ‘I’ are not. This being not present may, depending on how it is fashioned, become quite alien, a being equated with a disease, a ‘cancer’ called upon to disfigure an individual or a group” (Wander 214). Operative words: “They” and “Fear.” “They fear.” “There is, I think, a deep, underlying fear that there may be little real difference between maleness and femaleness,” Cromwell notes. “To acknowledge such a fact would unravel the fabric of biological determinism” (41). You can understand; you fear difference, too.

Here’s the tricky thing, the thing that’s hard to hear. It will take you a long time to understand this. Dr. Fry was right and wrong. You’re not trapped in a body. Your

body is yours. Regardless of what “they” have told you and taught you, you are male. You are your body; your body is male. “I cannot say that I was a man trapped in a female body,” Green writes. “I can only say that I was a male spirit alive in a female body, and I chose to bring that body in line with my spirit, and to live the rest of my life as a man. Socially and legally, I am a man. And still, I am a different kind of man” (Visible Man 7).

Somehow, you got some signifiers that society does not perceive as male. Because of that, your own internal fears, and all the messages you received from your world around you, you learned that being different meant being wrong, bad or immoral. “And although we have been programmed to fear [the old divide and conquer routine],” Lorde writes, “We can move beyond that fear by learning to respect our visions of the future more than we respect our terrors of the past. And this cannot be done without strenuous personal effort, and the sometimes painful scrutinies of change” (Gay Insurgent 13).

Your internal feelings that something was wrong were correct and probably saved you. “It is through our bodies that we experience and come to know the realities of our world” (Cromwell 31). That, coupled with ways of knowing and learning who we are, has saved us. You were also fortunate to have a partner who understood and was willing to grapple with these issues. She loved you so much that she was able to step aside, with help, and let you grow. She loved you through it.

You didn’t come through the struggle alone or in a vacuum. “The struggle to create the future is possible,” Wander writes, “only if a space exists where people can

deliberate and act to bring about change. In democratic political theory, this is called 'public space.' Without a public space, criticism lapses into eulogy or falls silent" (206). You had a teacher who helped you, reinforcing the adage of "When the pupil is ready, the teacher will appear." She introduced you to Leslie Feinberg and Audre Lorde, who sang out to you from her grave in poetry you had never heard before. She spoke to you of your grief, the grief of feeling hated by others, who saw you as different and hated you for it. "Transpeople...who do not affirm the primary categories of gender are feared, and consequently, ignored, disavowed, discounted, discredited, and frequently accused of not being a true person" (Cromwell 103). As you grew stronger, you learned to let them and their criticisms go, and plenty of others supported you on your road to self-actualizing.

You found people who identified as trans. You began to adopt the language that worked for you and discarded that which did not. You began to consider whether you, too, wanted to transform your body more to male, knowing that the process would not be easy. Through the transitioning process, you learned who your true friends were and who loved you. "During my transition," Green writes, "I learned about shame, fear, and hatred. I also learned what courage is" (Visible Man 8).

You began your transition years after the hospitalizations had ceased, and you had learned to grow accustomed to the melancholic unanswerable question. You transitioned after you found a life partner, at a time in your life when you had settled down and your life was going well. That was the most amazing thing of all: You did not fit a traditional diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder, and no one gave you one.

The official prerequisites of transsexual discourse says that “a conflict has to be established; there has to be enormous suffering; there has to be persistent ideation of oneself in the other gender; there has to be a trial period of cross-dressing...and there have to be therapy sessions and letters attesting to the balanced state of the person’s mind” (Butler, Undoing Gender 91). But no one gave you this diagnosis. “A new discourse is being created by those who articulate their transsubjectivity differently than medico-psychological discourses have allowed. They are, in a real sense, untying their tongues” (Cromwell 25). For some, this diagnosis is important for procuring hormonal treatment for transitioning. You were fortunate that your doctor never made a formal diagnosis of “Gender Identity Disorder,” which would have exacerbated your feeling stigmatized.

Because you were pathologized for so long, you were especially sensitive to the terminology used by medical science, finding the clinical term “transsexual” especially abhorrent. Those who worked with you within the medical establishment respected you and did not use the term. “There are important differences in the use of some terminology,” Cromwell explains. “For female-bodied transpeople, terminology such as ‘the operation,’ ‘pre-op,’ and ‘post-op’ are inadequate. There are no clear cut ‘pre’ and ‘post-op’ statuses for FTMs or transmen” (23). Medical personnel and the counselor you and Mo found acknowledged and affirmed your right to make your own decisions with a clear mind and conscious, by having researched the truth as thoroughly as only you would want and based on what you knew and felt was right for you.

4.2 *The Mourning of Transformation*

Grief came with change. It was like giving birth, or like waking up from a dream after a lifetime of sleep. A period of mourning accompanied your awakening. “One mourns when one accepts the fact that the loss one undergoes will be one that changes you, changes you...forever, and that mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation, the full result of which you cannot know in advance” (Butler, Undoing Gender 18). But the grief, the entire process in fact, transformed you.

During your transition, you entered another phase of being unrecognizable as male or female, a period in which others who did not know you well and only saw your physical changes without recognition or understanding hurt you with their words and their silences. “This violence emerges from a profound desire to keep the order of binary gender natural or necessary,” Butler writes, “to make of it a structure, either natural or cultural, or both, that no human can oppose and still remain human” (Undoing Gender 35). This part of the transition was not easy because before you changed, those who strongly disapproved and feared you for transitioning put you in a box marked “lesbian,” a context that they understood. Because you stepped out of that box, in which they had placed you, they no longer had a category for you, and they were afraid and blamed you for it. Once again, you became an “other.”

You didn’t just read a couple of books in graduate school and decide to transition. Others helped you along the way. You met others who, like you, were different. “We can argue that no one achieves autonomy without the assistance or support of a community,” Butler writes, “especially if one is making a brave and difficult choice such

as transitioning” (Undoing Gender 76). Just sitting down with us is Simon, the first guy I ever knew was transgender and I got to know. I learned that he identified as gay, and I did not understand at first how he could think he was gay. I learned that transmen are men and can be gay. I also learned from Simon that not all transmen identify entirely as men. “Transmen and FTMs may identify as men, as transmen, as FTM, or as something else,” Cromwell explains (25).

Simon accepted me from the beginning as gender queer, supporting my right to be what I was. “I knew I didn’t want to continue living in a self-imposed underground because my body did not fit either male or female criteria,” Green writes. “I had grown too weary of living in that limbo state, though I know many people are just fine in that space, and I respect their choice to stay in it” (Visible Man 115). When living in the middle became too difficult and exhausting, when I was ready, I began the journey of transitioning.

Joining us, too, is Scott. Like me, Scott is a teacher, and he has done tremendous things within his school to change the system and make it safer for transpeople, especially the youth. “We must become actively involved with the ways in which the children of our communities are being socialized to accept the many forms of their own death,” Lorde writes, “eating poison, reading poison, and learning poison. For instance, where do our children learn the lessons of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and self-hate? What are our schools teaching our children?” (Gay Insurgent 13). These transgender men and women suffered terrible injustices and cruelty, intentional and unintentional, within and outside of their homes, from trying and not being able to

conform to a society that would not tolerate gender diversity. “Transgendered and transsexual people are subjected to pathologization and violence that is, once again, heightened in the case of trans persons,” Butler writes. “The harassment suffered by those who are ‘read’ as trans or discovered to be trans cannot be underestimated. They are part of a continuum of the gender violence that took the lives of Brandon Teena, Matthew Shepard, and Gwen Araujo” (Undoing Gender 6).

I learned that the pain of having to conform or face rejection began early for all of us, and I learned from Scott what I, too, was learning. I confirmed the importance of beginning the discussion earlier in our lives, before irreparable damage is done. Yet, we were still not able to talk about our own lives, for fear of rejection or ridicule. “The desire to kill someone, or killing someone, for not conforming to the gender norm by which a person is ‘supposed’ to live suggests that life itself requires a set of sheltering norms, and that to be outside it, to live outside it, is to court death” (Butler, Undoing Gender 34). Teachers who are gender variant also remain hidden, silent, and unable to talk about the silences and absences with students. “The objectification of certain individuals and groups discloses itself through what is and is not said *about* them and through actual conditions affecting their ability to speak for themselves” (Wander 210).

I learned through talking with Scott how fortunate I was to have transitioned after I resigned from teaching middle school. In fact, I could not have transitioned as a middle school teacher because it wouldn’t have been safe for me to do so, and I didn’t have the information I so desperately needed to find out who and what I was. Neither do our students, other than a fortunate few who are transgender and have begun to transition.

A few brave teenagers have already begun the process, some with parents who love them and are supporting them through it. “They have a right to grow,” Lorde writes, “free from the disease of racism, sexism, classism...and the terror of any difference...But they need us as role models, to know that they are not alone in daring to define themselves, outside the approved structures” (Gay Insurgent 13). Armed with information and knowledge, each person should be allowed to choose what is best or most appropriate for his or her own life. As long as the voices that children hear are not informed by our direct experiences, we continue to be vulnerable, inviting others to treat us with nothing more enlightened than prejudice (Green, Visible Man 177). Scott reminded me of why I was proud to be a teacher.

Donald then sits down to join us. Donald learned later in life that he was transgender. He and I were making the decision of whether or not to transition at exactly the same time. I found a fellow traveler in him. Through talking about transitioning and our fears surrounding it, we helped each other find the courage to move ahead. “Our feelings and the honest exploration of them become sanctuaries and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas,” Lorde writes. “They become a safe house for that difference so necessary to change and the conceptualization of any meaningful action,” (Sister Outsider 37). I remember sharing with Donald how afraid I was of being a freak. “No,” he reassured me, “You may feel like a freak now, but your transition will only make you more male.” He, too, taught me more about courage.

We attended a support group for transmen and those who are questioning. We met only once a month, and we discussed our feelings and explored our questions and

concerns. I attended the first meeting before I transitioned. It was a small, intimate group. “The ‘master’s tools’ consisted in dividing members of subordinated communities by extending privileges to some through access to the interior of ‘the master’s house’ while exploiting most others in the field to support their dwelling” (Black 111). We found our own table inside our own mansion, and we talked about things I never even dared to dream before with men I admired. We talked about what worked for us, and what didn’t. We found power and strength in one another’s experiences. “I am sick of the silences...I want to hear you speaking all the languages, offering your experience as your truth, as human truth, talking about working, about making, about unmaking...about killing, about feeling, about thinking...There’s a lot of things I want to hear you talk about” (Lorde, Sister Outsider 9). We didn’t always agree, and we were not all alike. But we found power in our visions and our words. We sat at the table together, and we grew strong.

I watch as you stir in your chair. You seem to watch me from a distance, from behind fearful eyes. I am now what you would have most feared, what you were taught to fear. “When we change our sex, we may confuse, confound, frighten, disgust, and disappoint others,” Green writes, “but we can also inspire. We live the dreams others are afraid to live, or perhaps even to dream” (Visible Man 202). I smile, knowing that a reality of which you have not even dreamed has begun. “There are others who helped us,” I tell you.

A woman comes and sits comfortably next to me, a woman with the most beautiful, intense eyes you have ever seen. Something stirs inside you, which is me,

which is us, which is love. “This is Mo,” I tell you, “She will be your beloved, your companion. She is the one who will walk the road with you.” She smiles at you with understanding and conviction, unafraid of loving who you were and who you are. She takes your hand in warm greeting, happy and unafraid to see you.

I learned from Mo that she needed me, my companionship, my love, my acceptance, as much as I needed her. “My advice to transpeople is to listen, listen, and listen some more,” Kailey writes. “Your friends and family, and especially your spouse...need to have their feelings and fears recognized and acknowledged by you, and they need some down time, some time away from the transition. Go to a movie, go to a picnic, do something that demonstrates you are still the person they love” (109). Something else stirs inside you. You sit up a little straighter now, excited by the possibilities that these people who have just sat down with you, Penny and Dani, have brought to you. “By standing up and claiming our identity as men who are also trans people, by asserting that our different bodies are just as normal for us as anyone else’s is for them,” Green writes, “by insisting that our right to modify our bodies and shape our own identities is as inalienable as our right to choose our religion (though not nearly as inexpensive or painless), we claim our humanity and our right to be treated equally under law and within the purviews of morality and culture” (Visible Man 5).

Two young boys and a young teenage girl sit down. These are your nephews and niece. They had no difficulty switching from female to male pronouns and names. They became great allies for you on this journey, often explaining to friends as simply as only children can do, “He’s a boy now.” They accept you without question; it is simply a

nonissue for them. “It’s certainly easier when the children are younger because they’re so much more accepting—but even older children can understand...if the quality of the relationship is strong, supportive, honest, and loving” (Green, Visible Man 143). Eight young adults enter and sit down. Some I know, and some I don’t. Three are Mo’s children; four are Simon’s and Donald’s children. Both Simon and Donald are men who gave birth to their children.

They are all happy to be there. Four women, Mo’s and my sisters, walk in with my brother and my mom. “It is common for transpeople to be disowned by family members as well as friends, either temporarily or permanently” (Cromwell 154). One day you will no longer doubt whether your mother loved you or not. Daughter or son, she loved you the same. You were simply her child. One day, she will tell you something very important, which you should never forget: “I want to leave the world in better shape than how I found it,” she will tell you. I think of Scott and realize that he and others have not yet found a way to tell their parents. You understood that your transition was not for you alone.

You learned that your transition and those of other transmen have profound and far-reaching effects on many people. “The possible shapes of what has not been before exist only in that black place,” Lorde writes, “where we keep those unnamed, untamed longings for something different and beyond what is now called possible and to which our understanding can only build roads. But we have been taught to deny those fruitful areas of ourselves” (Sister Outsider 101).

More people enter. Kids who look to be around high school age and a few more adults enter. They wave, happy to see you. The adults are the employers and coworkers you and other transmen you know have worked with. The teenagers are the students you and Scott have taught.

They are also faculty members you have worked with over the last few years, whom you have learned from, and who have learned from you. One woman puts a book in your hand entitled Sister Outsider and says that when you are ready, you should read it. You nod. At a loss for words at the encouragement and the support that now surrounds the table and pervades the once sterile and empty room, you sit and stare in dumb silence, meaning to thank her. “It’s ok,” the woman who gave you the book says, “One day, you will find your words.”

4.3 *Celebration of Community*

The atmosphere in the room has steadily changed, from one of mourning to one of celebration. People of all descriptions have entered the room and continue to enter. “In this room now there is a significant amount of people-power for social change,” Lorde writes, “and it must become conscious and useful power. That is the meaning of support and community” (Gay Insurgent 13). I found community and support in a myriad of people, not just transmen. In fact, most of them were not transgender and had never known or understood trans issues before. They were simply open to learning and celebrating diversity. “My experience of myself, corroborated by other functioning, self-actualized adults (heterosexual, lesbian, gay, and bisexual) who have known me,... is that

I seem far more comfortable to myself as a man, more ‘natural,’ and more acceptable to them. Not that they didn’t love or accept me before my transition to manhood, because they did” Green writes. “Some of them were resistant, even fearful concerning my change. But they rode the wave, and most of us have landed together, still friends, still relatives, still intrigued by the possibilities in life” (Visible Man 8).

There were those who did not accept my transition, some who judged me and made it difficult for me to transform. “Nonconformity (being a fearful ‘other’) frequently has its costs. One is *ridicule*. Another, extreme and brutal, is violence or even murder, as in the case of Brandon Teena” (Butler, Undoing Gender 102). Oddly enough, the reactions of others were mostly positive. When you talked to Simon and Donald, they shared the same findings, that the transition wasn’t as horrible as they had feared. “As we learn to bear the intimacy of scrutiny and to flourish within it,” Lorde writes, “as we learn to use the products of that scrutiny for power within our living, those fears which rule our lives and form our silences begin to lose their control over us” (Sister Outsider 36).

We feel better because of the transition. As Simon had said, he finally felt like a complete person. “To be progressive, change must progress towards something,” Wander writes. “That something, oriented around traditional humanist notions of human potential, is grounded in the *emancipation of human potential*” (205). We have become that which we have always been. With the exception of one transman you have met, none of you saw yourselves as boys all your life, but rather, as some derivative of the normative male. After you transition, most identify as men. Technically, each is a

transman, but more importantly, each is a man. The transition brings a peace and an end to this particular suffering. It's not a penis that makes one a man.

One thing that all physically non-questioning men know is that they aren't women. "Don't notice that I am different from other men unless you are ready to acknowledge that my uniqueness is the same difference that each man has from any other man," Green writes. "If transsexual men want to disappear, to not be seen, it is because they are afraid of not being seen as men, of being told they are not men, of being unable to refute the assertion that they are not men. All men fear this" (Visible Man 7). Perhaps all people fear this, to a lesser or greater degree.

Although I enjoy my anonymity, finally being seen as just another guy, I will always be aware of my transness, and I will often renegotiate when and with whom to share my trans experiences. "I remember what it was like to feel that anonymity as testosterone gradually obliterated the androgyny that for most of my life made others uncomfortable in my presence," (Green, Visible Man 182). Looking at you sitting across from me, listening so intently, I will never forget what you went through to get to where I am now. Remembering it exhausts me. I want to move beyond it now, take you out of here, and live the rest of my life in peace and anonymity.

The tricky part is that I am a man who lived female-bodied for 40 years. I have many years of experience that I don't want to discard and pretend never existed. "I take issue with advising any person, but especially someone middle-aged or older, to deny over half a life," Kailey writes. "Regardless of the quality of that life, it had an effect on the person who lived it. It molded and shaped that person in many ways. Ridding

oneself of one's past might allow a person to move into the post-trans, assimilated identity to which so many aspire, but to deny a former existence is to deny a large part of oneself" (140). Besides, I think, as I look back at the female part of myself, I love you. You are a part of me. Living in anonymity may make life more comfortable, but there are obvious problems, including not being able to let other people of different gender status know that transmen exist, and denying a large part of who I was.

I do not have to tell you that being trans can invite more problems. Transmen continue to be discriminated against in most areas. School campuses in California are hostile towards lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) and gender non-conforming people. For the rest of my life, I will have to remain diligent as a transman, and I will never be able to forget. "Every time a transsexual man goes into a public (or perhaps even private) toilet, he is aware of his history," Green writes. "Every time he applies for a job or seeks medical care; whenever he is at the mercy of a governmental body or social security agency, he is aware of his history...and—so long as he must fear the ignorance and hostility of others—he must be on guard against discovery" (Visible Man 180).

When to let others know and when not to do so will be a dance for me and will be the next part of my journey. "I haven't been there yet," I tell you with a grin. There are other journeys to be made, more paths to walk.

Some of these may include analyzing how transgender youth experience their transitions differently from those who are much older. Another might be to analyze the problems the elderly transmen face. Because transitioning is so new, this is an unknown

and unexplored area for most transmen. Another area of analysis could be exploring the challenges transmen of color face. We still do not know so much.

The others have wished you well and left, and the room has fallen silent again. I remember the years of searching, begging for the answer to questions I could not even articulate before. I know now the search was worth it. To search is always, always worth the price of discovery. “At first I thought my transition was not being looked at any longer, about my relief from scrutiny,” Green writes. “Now I know it [identifying as transgender] is about scrutiny itself, about self-examination, and about losing my fear of being looked at, not because I can disappear, but because I am able to claim my unique difference at last” (Visible Man 9). Audre Lorde would agree when she writes, “It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences” (Sister Outsider 27).

CHAPTER 5 -- FINDINGS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This project has been an in-depth examination of only a few of the challenges that transmen often face. Before ending it, I have found a need to summarize and explain discoveries I have made in creating this project. In this final section, I sum up what I have learned from this project, including the justification for and limitations of using feminist methods, findings and conclusions drawn from the data, implications for policy and practice, implications for theory, limitations of the study, and implications for further research.

5.1 Feminist Methods

I chose feminist methods for my project since they offered avenues for alternate voices to be heard including in-depth interviewing, participant observation, and autobiographical writing. In spite of their limitations, feminist methods helped give an avenue for the voices of transmen. They offered an opportunity for personal experiences of transmen to be heard and written about.

Because there is so little research in this area and none within the communication studies field that deals with female-to-male experiences, appropriate methods for my research were limited. Wander writes, “The objectification of certain individuals and groups discloses itself through what is and is not said about them and through actual conditions affecting their ability to speak for themselves” (210). Feminist methods at least help to rectify this.

I hope this project may serve as a wake-up call to examine the limitations of feminist methods and encourage exploring other methods that are multi-gendered and multi-genre. “To what extent do our academic assumptions or commitments prompt us to reflect on the meaning and significance of what is said in ways that ignore or...conceal important silences?” Wander asks (216). Although feminist methods offered an impetus and an avenue to look beyond positivist and quantitative research, perhaps it is time to explore still further how these methods might be opened even further to move beyond gendered language. Trans identities may be further silenced and limited by feminist methods because these methods were developed to highlight women’s voices. Feminist methods and the dominant language of lesbian, gay, and bisexual terminology continue to be all that are available to us, but we need to search for new methods and languages that will help us communicate more clearly, fully, and truly about the experiences of transpeople.

5.2 Findings and Conclusions

In my project, I have explored ways that lesbian terminology has silenced and subsumed trans identities. Kailey agrees when he writes, “The harassment and discrimination are based on *perceived* sexual orientation—perceived through that person’s gender presentation. The same thing happened to straight children and straight adults who do not present an ‘acceptable’ masculine or feminine gender” (94). The object of one’s affection must be separated from one’s gender identity because one is not unequivocally determined by the other, though in most cases, this is assumed to be the

case. This misperception has contributed to the homophobia and transphobia that permeates American society. “Gender and genitals are strongholds of control binding all people to a social order that has so far had serious difficulty acknowledging diversity” (Green, Visible Man 184). Besides having their transgender identities silenced by the conflation of sexual orientation with gender identity, transmen have been silenced through imposed gender conformity, including clothing and behavior that reflects only their physical bodies and not their full identities.

Conformity of clothes and behavior begins early in life and is enforced through adults, the media, schools, and the government. This year, the federal government has promised again to pursue amending the U.S. Constitution to make marriages of same-sex couples illegal. The fact that in most states it isn’t legal for same-sex couples to marry makes transitioning even more complicated (Transgender FAQ, 2007).

For some transpeople, transitioning may mean they have the right to marry their partners, provided they are allowed to change markers such as driver’s licenses and birth certificates to their new genders. For some, transitioning means losing their right to marry. Because I am straight and have been fortunate enough to change the marker on my driver’s license to male, I can now marry my partner of six years, which is a privilege. However, this doesn’t mean that this marriage cannot be contested after my spouse or I die. Gender conformity is reinforced explicitly and implicitly throughout society.

Many schools have dress codes; dormitories are segregated, most not allowing for differences. There are no textbooks, no role models reflecting the experiences of

transgender people. All forms of media are permeated with these gender norms. As “Madge” says in the Palmolive commercials, “You’re soaking in it.” Gender conformity is enforced nearly everywhere in our society. “Ideology...is all the more effective for not being recognized as such. I would only add that ideology, even when intentional, is sometimes possible only when those in power do not or cannot identify it as such” (Wander 214). Those who enforce this system, which is all of us to a greater or lesser extent, insist that there is something wrong with an individual who cannot or will not conform to it. Green writes:

As children, many future transmen are not capable of behaving the way other little girls do. We are teased and tormented by our classmates (and sometimes by our own families) because the masculine gender signals we express conflict with the feminine clothing we are forced to wear. Try as we might to please the adults around us or to be accepted by our peers, we are constantly aware of our inability to be who they want us to be” (Visible Man 204).

This censorship forces many trans people to maintain their silence in order to keep their safety, their livelihood, their sanity, and their lives. Green writes, “Anti-trans discrimination forces many trans people into a deadly cycle of poverty and unemployment. It prevents them from putting their abilities and skills to constructive uses, and often forces them into illegal activities in order to survive” (Visible Man 12). Although some individuals are comfortable with ambiguity or choose to stay gender ambiguous and not conform, being a fearful “other” frequently has its costs. One is ridicule. Another, extreme and brutal, is violence or even murder, as in the case of Brandon Teena (Cromwell 102). All interviewees in this project struggled with trying desperately to conform to these gendered norms and ultimately failed in exhaustion.

Last summer I taught American Literature at a local high school. The first day of class, I had a student named “Tiny.” Tiny was extremely bright, energetic, and as male as any of the boys who sat in my class. Tiny was also female-bodied. Tiny had a very feminine girlfriend and was the captain of his/her community ice hockey team. S/he showed me before and after pictures of himself. In one, a picture taken as a freshman, s/he looked very female; in the other, taken his/her junior year, s/he looked as male as any child I had ever seen. “My mom is proud of me,” s/he told me. “She thinks I make as cute a girl as I do a boy.” Oh, if only every adult were as accepting and supportive of his or her child as this mother was of hers.

I gave Tiny information on trans youth because s/he told me s/he was the president of the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) on his/her campus, and because I knew s/he did not have the information on trans youth that might at least arm him/her and others with information that s/he and many others might not have had. I felt conflicted on whether I should provide him/her with such information, knowing that this risk might mean losing my job if the administration found out. Tiny took the article to his/her GSA advisor, and the GSA advisor made copies for all the GSA students on that campus. I was fortunate and pleased that my decision to provide him/her the information had been the right one.

Later that summer while visiting with my mother, I told her the story of Tiny. “Mom,” I told her, “I don’t know whether Tiny will later decide to transition or not. I don’t really care. I don’t think everyone should. I wouldn’t wish what I have been

through as a person who had to decide to transition on anyone. We don't recruit [a word often used to suggest that gay men try to influence people overtly]".

"No, my dear," she wisely said, "but you certainly do enlighten."

In The Gay Insurgent, Audre Lorde wrote that our children have the right to grow, free from the disease of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia (and transphobia), and the terror of any difference. "But they need us as role models," she adds, "to know that they are not alone in daring to define themselves, outside the approved structures" (13).

In my project, I also explored ways that transmen learn to accept their trans identities, including classes, support groups, and various types of media, especially the Internet. Lorde writes, "As we know, we have always been everywhere, haven't we? The power of vision nourishes us, encourages us to grow and to change, and to work toward a future which is not yet" (Gay Insurgent 12). The project also explored various challenges that transmen who choose to transition to male face, including publicly transitioning within various social contexts such as work, school, and church, to name only a few. It also addresses the fears and the very real possibility of losing friends and family members as they change their appearances, legal and social markers.

On the other hand, I believe this project also points out the joys of choosing to transition and living our lives authentically and with autonomy. As transmen and their allies learn about the realities of their lives, we can help battle some of the assumptions and stereotypes that accompany transpeople and examine the ways that gender conformity hurts not only transgender people but also all who live within its terrible grip. Cromwell writes:

Often women, children, racial and ethnic minorities, gender and sexual minorities are constructed as others by those in power. Individuals become a group or a class of people, as in all women are...children are...and certain races are...Such statements deny the lived experiences of individuals as a result of discourses that construct them (101).

5.3 *Implications for Policy and Practice*

In some ways, this project may have conveyed the belief that transmen are all the same, or the transgender males who choose to transition are all white, middle to upper class, well-educated people. If I have conveyed that impression, I am sorry. No one speaks for all of us; that would be impossible. We can each speak only for ourselves, but we can talk about our observations and our experiences. Strangely enough, the voice that has guided me through my entire process the most was Audre Lorde, a black, lesbian, feminist poet who spoke to me posthumously and called to me to seek my own voice and to speak it loudly. I have no way of knowing whether or not she was transgender or if she even knew. We are everywhere, and oppression is everywhere.

I speak from the position of a white, middle-aged transman. In some respects, I come from a place of privilege, having enjoyed the benefits of a middle class upbringing, some very fortunate breaks in education and employment, and the fact that I am white. Nevertheless, I am a transman, and my life from that perspective will never be easy. I still cannot afford surgeries that some transmen have enjoyed, and I am not employed full-time.

It is interesting that I learned to face my own demons of oppression and come out as transgender within the context of Transcendence Gospel Choir, the world's first transgender choir. I am neither a person of color nor Pentecostal, and when I joined, I

had not yet begun to examine my white, middle-class privilege. However, as my spouse Mo, who also sings with the choir, said, “I have learned that acknowledging and letting go of my white middle class privilege does not mean I must be silent. Oppressing and silencing myself is not helpful. If I am to participate in community, my voice is needed as much as it is needed for the balance of the choir. The choir community needs me to take care of myself, to speak up about my own needs.” I continue to learn to let go of my privilege and confront my own demons of homophobia, transphobia and racism enveloped by this group of kindred spirits.

Through my work in this project and my own transitioning experiences, I have learned that there are so many oppressions, and that no matter who we are, we all deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. “We cannot separate our oppressions, nor yet are they the same,” Lorde writes. “That not one of us is free until we are all free; and that any move for our dignity and freedom is also a move for our community sisters and brothers, whether they have the vision to see it or not” (Gay Insurgent 13). Once people learn to see the qualities that make us who we are—both positive and negative, as the qualities that all of us possess, it will be possible to let go of preconceptions and see valuable human beings instead.

I have created this project within the context of communication studies. Transitioning from one gender to another is a profound communicative and educational event. The voices of transmen have been muted, and I hope that this project is one step in liberating our voices and enabling us to participate in the conversation of all humanity as complete and equal people. As such, transmen may have a place at the table and

communicate who we are, why gender is so important to society, and how we can liberate ourselves from its too often powerful and paralyzing grip.

5.4 *Implications for Theory*

I would also like to address theory briefly here. Since there was no literature in the Communication Studies field that pertained to the FTM experience, I had no ready-made theory to rely on. Glaser argues that a project using grounded theory (Lacey and Luff, 2005) is responsive to the situation in which the research is done. Oakley argues that taking data from several sources will increase one's chances of being able to establish trustworthy results. The aim is actually verification, not falsification—or both (67). The theory is emergent. Glaser suggests two main criteria for judging the adequacy of the emerging theory. First, it fits the situation; and secondly, it helps the people in the given situation to make sense of their experiences and to manage the situation better (Lacey and Luff 13).

I believe that in the process of transitioning from female to male-bodied, I experienced the stages of that process, moving from a state of melancholia, to one of mourning, to one of celebration. The stage of melancholia I experienced during all the years when I had no words for what I was, or for my feelings of difference and isolation. “Audiences have rarely seen the real faces of the transgendered. They don't hear our voices, rarely read our words. For too many years, we transgendered people have been playing a hiding game. We would [or could] never tell anyone who we were, and so we

were never able to find one another. That's just now beginning to change" (Bornstein 60). My interviews confirmed this isolation as a common experience.

The second stage was one of mourning, the stage that Butler speaks of when we must shed our old lives for that which is new. "No matter what my birth certificate says, a female baby was born to my parents, and that life didn't disappear the day I decided to transition," Kailey writes. "The only record of my life on earth as a transsexual man will be what I leave behind. But I don't remember being born, and I'm not going to remember dying. So the only thing that really matters is what I did with the life I was given in between those two events. I'm still working on it" (141). There is a period of grief when one transitions, when one moves from the darkness into the light. Green describes the effect of coming out trans as feeling like slowly lighting a series of candles in a dark cave rather than the opening of a closet door. I have heard one transman describe this experience as the "Rip Van Winkle" effect. For me, it has been a series of lessons being learned or of questions that I have asked all my life finally being answered.

The final stage of my transition was one of celebration, when I realized I wasn't alone. This corresponds with our learning that we are transgender and learning to accept it. Cromwell writes, "It is through our bodies that we experience and come to know the realities of our worlds" (31). This isn't to say that the experience of transitioning is one of unalloyed joy, but accepting and seeing myself as I was has made and continues to make me much happier.

Butler writes that no one achieves autonomy without the assistance or support of a community, especially when it involves the brave and very difficult decision of

transitioning. “Without community, there is no liberation,” Lorde writes, “only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and [his] oppression” (Sister Outsider 112). The people who support us, family members, friends, co-workers, other transgender people we meet along the way, can and do celebrate our becoming who we fully are at last. The data in my project have led me to the progression of the stages we transmen seem to go through: melancholia, mourning, and celebration.

5.5 *Limitations*

Clearly, there are limitations to this project. It in no way had the room or the scope to encompass all transgender or differently gendered voices, including transgender people of color, intersexual people, and transwomen. Of the six people I interviewed, one was Chinese American, and one was Latino. The other four were of Western European descent. “People of color on the FTM spectrum and their partners are a group of individuals who are extremely culturally diverse with varying gender identities and ways of describing themselves” (Wilkinson 4). This is true for all people who fit somewhere on the transgender spectrum, and this project only highlighted a few of these voices and experiences. The project dealt primarily with the experiences of older transmen, ranging in age from 32 to 63. With the exception of one co-participant, this project also only dealt with the experiences of transmen who reside in the South Bay Area of California. I have no doubt that even the experiences of transmen who live in other Bay area cities nearby, including Berkeley, Oakland, and San Francisco would be different from those living in the South Bay, not to mention other areas of the country.

5.6 *Implications for Further Research*

A research project that deals with transmen living in other areas of the country would enlighten others even more, as would one that examines the experiences of our FTM transgender youth. A research project that compares the experiences of transwomen with those of transmen would reveal even more and contribute richly to this field of knowledge. I also would encourage further studies that explore transgender issues in relation to class, ethnicity, and race.

My hope is that more research will be done within the field of communication studies on transgender issues. I firmly believe that the absence of that kind of research reflects how deeply entrenched the silencing of these voices has been. Transgender people are, have been, and will continue to speak to us. I encourage scholars within the field of communication studies to listen. If this project has contributed at all to the conversation about gender and gender minorities and to the emancipation of those of us who suffer from the oppression of gender conformity, then it has been a success.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I -- TERMINOLOGY

Binding: Wearing an elastic binder to flatten one's breasts in order to create a male-appearing chest.

Cross-Dresser: The most neutral word to describe a person who dresses, at least partially or part of the time, in clothes traditionally associated with people of the other sex. Cross-dressers are usually comfortable with the sex they were assigned at birth and do not wish to change it. The term carries no implications of 'usual' gender appearance or sexual orientation. Often, FTMs are more invisible than MTFs because it is more socially acceptable for female-bodied people to wear male clothing than for male-bodied people to wear women's clothing. A clinical term that many transgender people find offensive is "transvestite."

FTM (often used interchangeably with Transman): Female-To-Male transgender person who was assigned female sex at birth and feels that this is not an accurate or complete description of himself. An FTM therefore identifies as male or strives to fit a male gender role. Some feel it is more acceptable to use the abbreviation rather than the complete phrase. Also abbreviated as F2M or FtM.

Gender Dysphoria: Literally, the state of feeling unhappy with one's gender; synonymous with gender identity disorder.

Gender Identity: One's personal sense of being a man or a woman (or boy or girl). For transgender people, their birth-assigned sex and their own internal sense of gender identity do not match.

Gender Identity Disorder: As identified by psychologists and medical doctors, a condition in which a person who has been assigned one gender but identifies as another gender, or does not conform with the gender roles his/her society prescribes. This feeling is often reported as "having always been there," although in many cases it seems to appear in adolescence or even in adulthood and has been reported by some as intensifying over time.

Gender Queer: Genderqueer persons feel they do not fit into the traditional two-gender system. As with other transgender terms, the reasons for identifying as gender queer vary.

Gender Variant: A person who varies from the expected characteristics of the genetic gender.

Outing: Informing others about the transgendered status of a transperson without the transperson's permission. This is as much an invasion of privacy as is outing a gay man, lesbian or bisexual person.

Packing: A genetically female person wearing a rolled-up sock or some other object to give the appearance of having male genitals.

Pass: For a transperson, to present oneself convincingly in the preferred gender. A transperson may be able to pass well and still prefer to be out as trans. Others want to be known simply as their preferred gender, which is sometimes called being in stealth mode.

Testosterone (or "T"): The male sex hormone. Actually, all people have testosterone in their systems, though males have a great deal more of it. Some testosterone is necessary to have a sex drive. Although most supplemental testosterone is delivered via injections, it can also be delivered in other forms such as gel and patch.

Transgender: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender people may or may not choose to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically. The term may include transsexuals, cross-dressers, and other gender-variant people. Intersexed people are sometimes included under the term, but many do not consider themselves to be trans. To be sensitive, use the descriptive term (transgender, transsexual, cross-dresser, FTM, MTF, genderqueer, intersex, third gender) preferred by the particular individual.

Transsexual: A person who establishes a permanent identity different from the sex they were assigned at birth and transitions or desires to transition with some type of medical alteration to obtain a different physical appearance. The stereotypical explanation is of a "woman trapped in a man's body" or *vice versa*, although many in the transsexual community reject this formulation. *This is a clinical term that is rejected by many transgender people.*

Transition: The process of changing sex, including hormone therapy, cross-living, and surgery. A practical minimum for this process is about two years, but usually it takes longer, sometimes much longer.

APPENDIX II -- CAST OF CHARACTERS

Anne: minister of the church

Aunt Kate: my mother's oldest sister

Aunt Pat: my mother's sister

Carla: member of 12-step group

Darren: the department chair

Doug: sister Penny's husband

Eli: sister Penny's son

Janelle: another instructor

Marty: member of 12-step group

Michael: sister Penny's son

Mo: my spouse

Paul: a professor

Penny: my oldest sister

Sammi: my advisor

Sheila: sister Penny's friend

Smitty: a professor

Uncle Bob: Aunt Pat's husband

APPENDIX III -- DATES OF IMPORTANT EVENTS

February 9, 2005: I receive my first testosterone injection.

April 4, 2005: I announce to my debate class that I am transgender and am physically transitioning after they ask about the noticeable change of my voice.

April 5, 2005: I begin recording my participation at the South Bay Trans Men Support group.

April 12, 2005: I meet with the head of the Northern Division of Kaiser Hospital, Dr. Robin Dea.

April 20, 2005: I announce to my 12-step group that I am transitioning.

April 23, 2005: I present Reader's Workshop on gender issues and transitioning of FTMs, "Opening the Gender Box," at the Unitarian Universalist Pacific Central District Assembly in Berkeley, California.

May 6, 2005: I announce to the Communication Studies faculty meeting that I am physically transitioning.

May 7, 2005: I announce to twenty congregants at my spouse's and my home church that I am physically transitioning.

May 10, 2005: I present the Reader's Workshop, "Opening the Gender Box," to students and faculty at San Jose State University.

May 12, 2005: I come out publicly to my public speaking Comm20 class at SJSU.

July 20-21, 2005: I acquire a driver's license and social security card in my new name and gender.

September 29, 2005: Ken, our counselor, announces that my transition is officially concluded.

October 30, 2005: I resume duties as speech and debate coach and am hired as full-time substitute teacher in the same district.

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