

## **Boycunts and Bonus Holes: Trans Men’s Bodies, Neoliberalism, and the Sexual Productivity of Genitals**

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*Recent theorizations of trans embodiment have brought attention to the ways neoliberalism limits the productivity of nonnormatively gendered bodies. This article deals with the discursive framing of embodiment and sexual desirability among trans men and other transmasculine persons negotiating Internet-mediated homoerotic spaces. Micro-level analysis of discourse structure and macro-level analysis of socio-political context together show how trans men navigate homonormative sexual economies by linguistically recuperating their bodies’ sexually productivity. Instead of undermining claims of embodied masculinity and homoerotic value, potential sites of exclusion—i.e., trans genitals—become sites of flexible accumulation that enhance rather than detract from their bearers’ desirability.*

**KEYWORDS** *discourse, embodiment, FtM, genitals, neoliberalism, sexuality, transgender*

In this article, we explore how trans sexualities, as discursive and embodied identities and practices, are mediated by the linguistic construction of genitals. Specifically, we explore how trans men, female-to-male individuals (FtMs), and others identifying on the transmasculine identity spectrum<sup>1</sup> linguistically frame their genital embodiment as both productive features of

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their maleness and components of sexual desirability in the context of a homoerotic sexual economy. We draw on multiple research projects to analyze the discursive negotiation of genital embodiment among trans men (and other persons assigned female at birth) in both overtly sexualized and non-sexualized social settings. The discursive framing of the body by participants in each of these studies highlights similarities in trans men's and transmasculine practices of genital resignification in a range of contexts, identities, and milieux. Together, the data we analyze in this article reflect some of the ways trans men discuss their surgically unaltered genitals not as sites of shame or disgust but rather as viable and desirable features of their male bodies.

The importance trans persons have placed on their corporeality is sometimes discussed as being at odds with poststructuralist readings of biological sex as a discursive phenomenon (Garber, 1997; Lorber, 1994; Prosser, 1998; Rosario, 2004; Serano, 2007). Rather than situate gender, sex, or sexuality as either discursive or pre-discursive, in this article we identify the relationship between discourse and the body as complicated, recursive, and co-constructed. That is, contrary to claims that the body cannot be transcended or "reimagined by a discursive mantra," as Rosario (2004, p. 284) puts it, we argue that trans men's and transmasculine persons' talk about the body reveals the ways that discourse can indeed disrupt some of the most common-sense "facts" (i.e., ideologies) about, sex, sexuality, and desire. At the same time, we see discourse and the body as inextricably linked such that discourse does not override the truth of the body but rather brings it into social existence. In response to Judith Butler's notion of gender as performative and sex as "gender all along," Beasley and Bacchi (2005) argue that when "the materiality of the body (its substance, limits and particularity) is collapsed into culture, it becomes insignificant. Butler's body is no body at all" (p. 346). They remind us that while the theorist may unhinge the ideologies of gendered social practices from their biologically charged antecedents, there remains a fleshy instantiation left behind by all discursive performances. Salamon (2010) addresses the focus on materiality that has characterized the development of transgender studies as a field and uses the tools of psychoanalysis and phenomenology to highlight the interplay between the corporeal and the rhetorical, which is an approach that aligns with our own. Bringing a social scientific approach to discourse, we focus on the ways that language reveals how this interplay is continuously brought into existence in everyday life.

The discourses we consider in this article contest the notion that trans persons' bodies necessarily exist in conflict with their self-identified genders. According to classic diagnostic criteria (Benjamin, 1966; Meyer et al., 2001), gender identity disorder<sup>2</sup> has been defined partly by the potential trans subject's rejection of or disassociation from their (surgically unmodified) genitals. While this characterization may be true for some, in this article we highlight the various ways many trans persons conceptualize their genitals as a

source of erotic pleasure and personal productivity within marketplaces of sexual exchange. We accomplish this by focusing on the discursive framing of trans genitals in homoerotic encounters (or potential encounters) between male-identifying subjects. Rather than being a marker of stigmatized difference, we find that trans men may frame their embodiment in these contexts as enhancing—rather than detracting from—their desirability as homoerotic sexual subjects. In contrast to the ways homonormativity and neoliberalism have disciplined trans bodies and subjectivities (Aizura, 2006; Irving, 2008), the neoliberal individualism, normative masculinity, and sexual flexibility we uncover in trans men's online discourse may paradoxically function to appeal to otherwise conservative homonormative regulations of bodies and sexuality (Duggan, 2003).

Our focus on the discursive practices of trans men and transmasculine persons is driven by our research on a cross-section of Internet-mediated textual and audiovisual contexts in which talk about genitals figures centrally. These contexts include spaces where trans men and other transmasculine persons engage in online sexual cruising, in-group discussions of the body, and homemade online pornography. Additionally, these data are supplemented by interviews with trans men and transmasculine persons on the topic of disclosure, or the practice by which one makes one's trans history or present experience known to others (Edelman, 2009; Zimman, 2009). By bridging linguistic and ethnographic methods of inquiry, we are able to more fully explore the ways in which trans men and transmasculine people linguistically reformulate hegemonic notions of homoerotic male embodiment and its concomitant genital elements. As our theoretical lens, we call upon a somatechnological understanding of the body (Stryker, 2008; Sullivan & Murray, 2009) that allows us to unpack the *social flesh* of the body, or “the interaction between subjectivity, embodiment, intimacy, social institutions and social interconnection” (Beasley & Bacchi, 2005, p. 59) in the deployment of technologies and techniques like the strategic uses of linguistic resources on which we focus. In other words, we consider how the body is not simply a static site on which gendered ideologies are draped but rather constitutes a dynamically co-constructed ground on which gendered and sexual subjectivities are forged in everyday interactions. Yet a somatechnological perspective on the body also demands that we do not lose sight of the materiality of the body as both affected by discourses and expressed and felt through them.

Within the larger Western context, gender is typically assigned to the body at birth based on visual examination of genital configuration. This reduction of the body to genitals, to one particular site of imagined difference or variation, is a model of what Grabham (2007) refers to as *hyper-embodiment*, wherein only one portion of the body becomes the focal point of personhood. Bodies that deviate from a gender-as-genitals configuration are subject to hyper-embodiment as a means of regulating their

potential productivity and, in some cases, citizenship. Projects of hyper-embodiment involve surveillance, inspection, and, ultimately, reception. The visualization of gendered bodies, and specifically trans bodies, has often been one of hyper-embodiment wherein there is a “violence of inspection, the privileging of the visual over the figurative” (Halberstam, 2005, p. 93). In this context, wherein gender/sex is located at the site of the genitals and the tendency is to rely on hegemonic “common sense” notions to guide our understandings of what we see, documenting the evaluation of trans men’s genitals by non-trans persons is of particular importance to our discussion. The linguistic negotiation of identity is a co-constructed “dialogical practice in which the uptake of one’s semiotic acts may be as consequential as the structure of the semiotic acts themselves” (Blommaert, 2005, p. 205). When it comes to trans men’s pre- or non-operative genitals, hegemonic readings may render them features of a “female” body; yet through the discursive co-constructed meaning-making that we document herein, this reading of trans men’s and transmasculine embodiment is both malleable and implicitly dynamic.

To be clear, bodily expressions and experiences documented in this article do not represent any specific or singular morphology. Some of these bodies have undergone surgical and hormonal changes, while others have not. Our goal here is not to claim or maintain that trans men and transmasculine persons categorically have or identify as having particular kinds of bodies or necessarily identify positively or negatively with their bodies. Instead, our aim is to explore the diversity of identities and practices among trans men and transmasculine subjects to highlight the ways in which dominant ideologies encourage readings of a “trans” body as lacking or incomplete.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### Trans Bodies and (Sexual) Productivity

Historically, trans-specific research on the body has focused on medical or surgical procedures rather than critically examining the relationships between gender identity, sexuality, and genitals (see Denny, 1994 for a list of significant texts). Those that do attend to a socially embedded trans body have done so through psychoanalytic (Prosser, 1998; Salamon, 2010) and phenomenological approaches (Rubin, 2003; Salamon, 2010) as well as through analysis of embodied narratives of lived experience (Cromwell, 1999; Prosser, 1998). Yet these inquiries often forego discussion of how socio-political structures framing those somatic experiences converge with both sensation and linguistic performativity. Our investigation of the language of genital embodiment situates trans lived experience in the somatic and sensual body as well as in the political-economic conditions of its

production. Affect, emotional experience, and physical sensation, however, cannot be divorced from the experience of embodied life (as emphasized by Rubin, 2003 and Salamon, 2010), and here we must consider how knowledge about one's own body potentially guides and drives the discretionary logic of discursively navigating sexuality and desire.

When it comes to the political dimensions of trans embodiment, the role of medical and psychological diagnosis has placed particular burdens on trans persons attempting to gain access to capital and cultural productivity (Guidotto, 2007). In the U.S. context, deeply infused with assumptions of neoliberal political economies, this bodily productivity is linked to the capacity to maintain stable employment, fit normative gender roles, and engage with other normalizing technologies. For trans persons, these normalizing technologies would include, for example, laws requiring reproductive sterilization and/or other surgical interventions prior to gaining the capacity to change one's gender marker on legal documentation (see NCTE, 2010 for a complete list of state-based U.S. policies). Additionally, to secure employment in the formal economy, one must first produce documents detailing one's citizenship (such as a driver's license or birth certificate); for the gender transgressor, the process of acquiring these documents is lengthy, potentially costly, and demands ascription to particular racialized, heteronormative, and class-based gender hegemonies (Aizura, 2006; Finn & Dell, 1999; Meyer et al., 2001; Roen, 2001; Stryker, 2008). Through fulfillment of medico-legal definitions of gender pathology, a trans person can gain access to technologies that "repair" presumed mind-body discordance, and thus to legal documentation of citizenship. These technologies, such as hormone treatment and surgery, serve as "correction" in terms of both the political demands made of trans subjects to be "normal," as well as the very real discomfort felt by many trans subjects. At the time of our research, a trans person must often secure a diagnosis of "gender identity disorder" (as outlined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, or *DSM*), recently replaced with the diagnostic category of "gender dysphoria," to access medical and legal resources. This evaluative demand, or even the mere labeling of one's experience as "transsexual," works to demand an erasure of variability in gender expression and identity and to apply pathology to vastly different kinds of bodies and experience by virtue of their deviance from a narrowly defined norm. It is through a "successful" body transformation, wherein one has produced an image of having shifted from one hegemonic gender category to another in physical form, that trans subjects may acquire the documents proving their citizenship and thus authenticate their ability to be productive in neoliberal economies (Irving, 2008). Neoliberally infused attempts made by the medical establishment to make sense of gender-transgressing bodies and identities, then, work to obscure subject-oriented identifications with the body.

Finally, while many trans men and transmasculine persons certainly identify as heterosexual, the demands that homonormativity (Duggan, 2002; Stryker, 2008) place on the precariously conjoined “LGBT community” impact how trans men—particular those engaging in homoerotic encounters—may discursively manage their bodies. At the heart of homonormativity is the acquisition—and thus support—of the dominant heteronormative “rights and duties” of citizenship, including, but not limited to, marriage, serving in the military, adoption, and other modes of consumption and (re)production. Most importantly, homonormativity does not strive to destabilize normative gender or sexual ideologies “but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan, 2002, p. 179). Simply put, homonormativity reproduces the very cissexist ideologies employed by medico-legal establishments in the regulation of trans bodies (on cissexism, see Serano, 2007). If we regard homonormativity as a mode by which gays and lesbians can gain access to rights typically accessible only to “good” heterosexual citizens (via heteronormativity), then we can also conceive of homonormativity as a framework for embodied and gendered citizenship claims. Hetero- and homonormativity alike constitute sets of rules valorizing Whiteness, (re)production, consumption, depoliticization, and only the most privileged, normative forms of gendered and sexed embodiment.

### Linguistic Embodiment and the Discursive Construction of Sex

In the interdisciplinary study of language, gender, and sexuality, the lexicon has long been identified as a key site for the negotiation of gendered power. Lakoff’s (1975) foundational work on “language and woman’s place,” for instance, outlines the semantic inequality in word pairs such as *master/mistress*; *governor/governess*; *courtier/courtesan*; and *patron/matron*. Bodine (1975) similarly considers the androcentrism of linguistic standards such the generic masculine (i.e., *he* over *he or she*; *mankind* over *humankind*). See Cameron (1998) for a compendium of this literature, including work by McConnell-Ginet (1989), who later (2001) extended her politically sensitive semantic work with an analysis of *queer* and its potential to serve as a “fuzzy” referent—a fuzziness that, she argues, serves well for the project of LGBTQ political inclusion.

In contrast with the study of power and inequality in gendered lexical items, research on language and embodiment has been slower to take root in the interdisciplinary field dubbed sociocultural linguistics (Zimman & Hall, 2009). However, there are a few important publications on language and the body that help to situate the work we present here. First, Braun and Kitzinger (2001) investigate standard dictionary definitions of genitals. By comparing the way “male” and “female” genitals are defined, the authors

show that dictionaries reinscribe male sexual dominance and heteronormativity by framing men as sexually active and women as sexually passive while also promoting the assumption that the purpose or function of male genitals is to copulate with female genitals and vice versa. Cameron (1992), meanwhile, asked college students to list slang words for genitals, which led the author to focus on the metaphorical qualities of genital body-part terminology. Disturbingly, she found that male students' metaphors, in particular, tended to cast the penis as a source of danger or physical force (e.g., jackhammer, missile, snake, torpedo). Finally, Motschenbacher (2009) takes a poststructuralist approach to biological sex by considering how men's and women's magazines construct certain body parts as feminine (e.g., fingernails), while others are treated as masculine (e.g., the muscles of the arm), despite the fact that these anatomical features are shared by all gender groups. In this case, Motschenbacher's focus is on non-genital body parts. Zimman (2014; also Zimman & Hall, 2009) uses a similar theoretical approach to biological sex as rooted in discourse but goes a step further by arguing that even purportedly gender-specific anatomy, such as the genitals, are accorded their gendered meaning through discourse; this argument is further elaborated in this article. What characterizes all this work is a recognition that linguistic analysis can illuminate precisely how the gendered properties associated with the body are constructed.

We further extend existing literatures by examining how body-part terminology is deployed in various types of interaction, rather than looking only to mediated contexts (as with Braun and Kitzinger's dictionary definitions and Motschenbacher's analysis of magazines) or terms elicited in interview and survey contexts (as in Cameron's study). Toward the goal of linking micro-level talk about the body with macro-level discourses about gender, genitals, and sexuality, we draw on the principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA; Blommaert, 2005; van Dijk, 1993). CDA demands close attention to not only *what* is said but also *how*, and in *what contexts*, speech occurs. Context, in this case, refers both to fine-grained variation in linguistic and interactional particularities as well as the way language use is situated with respect to larger cultural, political, and ideological environments.

One of the important macro-level ideological systems toward which we direct our attention is constituted by hegemonic notions of biological sex as a naturalized system for classifying bodies. Informed by poststructuralist theorizations of sex as having no pre-discursive existence (Butler, 1993; Kessler, 1998; Meyerowitz, 2002; Nicholson, 1994), we recognize that conceptualizations of sex, like gender, differ across historical and sociocultural contexts (e.g., Herdt, 1993). Thus, while current medical models may be regarded by many as objectively accurate descriptions of the "facts" of nature, the notion that any given particular body is classifiable as "female" or "male" is open to contestation. And this proposition reflects what we have observed in multisite ethnographic research in transmasculine communities across the

United States: in talk about bodies, it is increasingly common for trans men to describe and otherwise construct themselves as “male-bodied.” This trend stands in contrast with prior characterizations of trans men as “female-bodied men” (e.g., Cromwell, 1999). To situate trans men as “female-bodied men” suggests that gender is open for self-identification, whereas “sex” constitutes an immutable category that is fundamentally different from gender. Yet even trans men who forego genital surgery—or any body modification at all—may claim the descriptor *male-bodied* for themselves (Zimman, 2014). In doing so, they make a rather bold claim, suggesting that sex is, in fact, open to self-determination such that a “male body” can be defined as the body of a (self-identified) man.

## METHOD

In this article, we utilize data from Internet-mediated contexts in which trans genitals are produced, presented, discussed, and evaluated by both trans and cis<sup>3</sup> interlocutors. Our analyses are informed by Zimman’s work in an online community geared toward trans men, in which he analyzes members’ use of both normatively male and female lexical items for referring to genitals (e.g., *penis*, *dick*, *vagina*, *cunt*) in order to consider the ways language can be deployed to reformulate culturally dominant ideas about biological sex. We summarize some of the major findings from Zimman’s quantitative and qualitative linguistic analysis of lexical items from an archive of online data compiled in 2007 from all public postings in an online forum with a readership of several hundred users. Zimman’s semantic analysis examines the distribution of words used in unambiguous reference to either trans or non-trans genitals during a one-month period in which 258 discussion threads appeared, each with anywhere from 0 to 100 unique responses. In addition to coding all instances of genital reference both by the word used as well as the sex of the referent, Zimman also produced qualitative analyses of the discourse contexts in which these terms tended to appear based on ethnographically informed readings of interactional stances and speech acts occurring in the talk analyzed. Though we only outline here the findings presented in much greater depth elsewhere (Zimman, 2014), this lexical analysis of genital terminology informs the present approach to discursive strategies of sexual productivity among trans men and transmasculine persons in other contexts.

Our analysis deals primarily with data Edelman collected between 2007 and 2011 as part of a series of investigations into the ways trans men navigate notions of bodily transgression in the virtual homoerotic male spaces of online personal advertisements, chat-based Web sites, and other online venues wherein men seek other men for erotic chat or “real-life” sexual encounters. To further elucidate dynamics of genital expression and



co-construction, we also draw on linguistic data Edelman collected from postings of and responses to erotic videos of FtM and transmasculine bodies posted to Xtube, a free erotic image and video repository featuring amateur uploaded media. Finally, we reference interviews conducted by Edelman from 2007–2008 with 30 trans male-identifying persons who report that cruising online is part of their current or past sexual repertoires.<sup>4</sup> Analysis of online personal advertisements was carried out during the same time period via the Internet-mediated spaces used by interviewees to meet other men for sexual or romantic encounters, including [www.manhunt.net](http://www.manhunt.net), [www.adam4adam.com](http://www.adam4adam.com), [www.gay.com](http://www.gay.com), and [www.craigslist.org](http://www.craigslist.org). However, we have utilized only data collected from the publically searchable “personals” section of [www.craigslist.org](http://www.craigslist.org) because of its anonymization of users and open accessibility to anyone with Internet access.

Through weekly searches from March 2007 to March 2008 in a major metropolitan area in the U.S., Edelman collected the full text of ads meeting the search terms *FtM*, *transguy/trans guy*, *transman/trans man*, and other variations of *transgender*. Finally, we refer to Edelman's work on language used by and in reference to trans men and transmasculine persons on Xtube, a free online erotic film and image repository wherein users can upload amateur footage of themselves and others. Based on Xtube's system for “tagging” media with searchable terms, Edelman based his search parameters on the terms that emerged most commonly in films featuring bodies labeled as FtM, trans men, or transmasculine. These terms included *f2m*, *ftm*, *transman/trans man*, and *trannyfag*. Searching with these parameters rendered a total of 428 videos. Language deployed both in the profile of the video poster and in responses to the film was included in the dataset for qualitative discourse analysis following the parameters of CDA. All identifying information collected in these contexts, including names and locations, have been replaced with pseudonyms.

## FINDINGS

### Online Communities and Film: Production and Expression

Language plays a central role in the social construction of particular bodies and body parts as “female” or “male.” That is, language not only reflects but also acts to constitute the gendered meanings applied to the body because social meanings do not exist prior to their semiotic referentiality. The notion that hegemonic readings of bodies as female or male is contestable is the focus of Zimman's (2014) work on genital body-part terminology in an online discussion community for trans men. Specifically, Zimman asks how certain trans men are able to discursively frame themselves as male-bodied even when discussing the parts of their bodies that can be read by others as evidence of female embodiment, and he points to four distinct tactics within

the particular community he studied. First, Zimman shows how members decouple body parts from gender such that a penis is not necessarily portrayed as an organ found on men and a vagina is not necessarily a signifier of womanhood. Second, participants draw on discourses about sex that support a reading of trans male bodies as at least ambiguously sexed, if not categorically male. For instance, many users in this group emphasize that sex is much more complex than just chromosomes or genitals, and that hormonal and even purportedly neurological sex differences undermine the classification of trans men as female-bodied. Even more significantly, trans men in this community frequently invoke the continuum that exists between penises and clitorises (Fausto-Sterling, 2000) and often situate themselves on that continuum by virtue of the genital growth testosterone typically provides. Very often, the difference between the genitals of trans men and those of non-trans men is cast as a difference in size rather than type (with trans men's genitals just "a little smaller than that of a cisgender man [ . . . ]," as the author of Example Four, below, puts it). Strikingly, members of this community often make the explicit argument that biological sex is open to self-identification and that a male body should be defined only as the body of a self-identified male person.

One of the most notable findings from Zimman's work, though, is that the members of the community he documents do not exclusively make use of male genital terminology, as might be expected from male-identifying subjects. In fact, it is common for participants to mix typically male-referential language (e.g., *dick*) and typically female-referential language (e.g., *cunt*) in reference to the same body. Zimman argues that this is accomplished most fundamentally by severing the ostensibly unbreakable connection between gendered body parts (e.g., a vagina) and the sex categories with which they are associated (e.g., female). The point of Zimman's analysis that is of greatest interest here is the observation that one of the contexts in which typically female-referential language is used—particularly when it comes to sexualized terminology like *pussy* or *cunt*—is in discussions of erotic experiences involving those body parts that are being positively evaluated by the speaker.

As in Zimman's study, by far the most common tactic employed across the data analyzed herein involves the use of vernacular terminology ordinarily used for male genitals, especially *dick*, *cock*, and *penis* (which, in Zimman's sample, together constituted 61% of all references to trans men's genitals). At the same time, we find further evidence of trans men and trans masculine persons' eroticized engagement with canonically female genital lexical items, such as *pussy*, *vagina*, and *cunt*, as well as trans-specific terminology for this body part, such as *bonus hole*. We now turn our attention to trans men and transmasculine persons' negotiation of predominantly cisgender spaces, wherein having a differently constructed male body or identity that departs from homonormative prescriptions may destabilize their legitimacy as men seeking sexual contact with other men.

## Trans Disclosure and Genital Erotics: Production and Reception

While the bodies and sexual desires of the trans men and transmasculine persons whose linguistic practices we analyze herein are heterogeneous, each goes about the linguistic work of disclosure—the explanation or exploration of gendered or genital difference—in their sexual interactions. In these online platforms, the project of disclosure is a complicated one. For one seeking sexual encounters, an in-depth discussion of one's gendered history or genital makeup may seem overly burdensome, if not distracting from the erotic moment. Moreover, these contexts are sexualized ones; male-on-male homoeroticism and the hegemonic discourses guiding them are additional ideologies trans men must navigate. The demands of homonormativity and of a normative kind of cisgendered embodiment thus also exert their force.

### EXAMPLE 1: INTERVIEW WITH JAKE

I said, 'Well, that means I have a cunt.' I had already had a couple of drinks at that point. That seems like a straight-forward answer to me rather than saying, 'I have three holes instead of two.' I have no interest in saying things to him like, 'Well, I was assigned female at birth and this is what I've done.' I still don't want to explain my life history to him in that space.

Jake, a gay-identified FtM in his mid-30s interviewed by Edelman, alludes in Example 1 to the immediacy with which a sexual interlocutor might wish to convey their embodiment. In this interview excerpt, Jake identified the most succinct and clear route for disclosure as stating he had a "cunt" rather than utilizing language that was more ambiguous, such as referring to an unnamed third "hole" or providing his "life history." In contrast, the process of disclosure in online mediated conversation was, while certainly to the point, also situated in a larger discourse of desirability.

### EXAMPLE 2: CRAIGSLIST

Playtime . . .

Cute young, always up for a good time. Hook-ups mainly, not into dating. I'm also an FTM transsexual, original equipment below the belt. If you don't know what this means, look it up.

In Example 2, from Craigslist, the online poster frames his disclosure through appeals to versatility, which Leap (2014) identifies as a feature of homonormative sexual practice by virtue of its prioritization of individual

desire over relational roles (i.e., “top” versus “bottom”). He describes himself as a potential playmate, as “cute[,] young, always up for a good time”; he is young, attractive, and immediately available. His disclosure of a bodily difference is situated as secondary to his attractiveness and accessibility. He briefly explains he is an “FTM transsexual” with “original equipment below the belt.” Genitals are referenced here as mechanical and degendered “equipment,” further challenging their significance or potential to undermine the poster’s viability as a proper homoerotic sexual object choice. Finally, he shifts the responsibility of knowledge to the reader of the post without mitigation: “If you don’t know what this means, look it up.” That is, he situates his “different equipment” as unremarkable and easily understood. This kind of linguistic framing is echoed in the ads of other transmasculine persons.

#### EXAMPLE 3: CRAIGSLIST

Attractive young FTM guy in NW DC looking to play with a fit top. I’m 5’9 Slim White and look completely male except I’ve got my original equipment below the belt.

In Examples 2 and 3, posters attend to genital structures to some extent but only after framing themselves as having otherwise “authentically” masculine embodiment. As in Example 2, the poster of Example 3 discloses genital difference in terms of having “original equipment below the belt.” Once again, the highlights of this post are those features that are highly valued in a potential sexual mate, according to homonormative standards: the poster is attractive, slim, White, and “completely male.” Through a lens of homonormativity, he has an ideologically productive body that situates trans embodiment as unproblematically gendered, posing no threat either to the stability of his claims to maleness or to the homoerotic desires of a potential reader.

#### EXAMPLE 4: CRAIGSLIST

I’m a female-to-male (FTM) trans man seeking verbal doms. I only engage in safe, sane, and consensual play. I am disease and drug free and would prefer for you to be as well. I DO NOT entertain party-and-play [PNP] or bare backing [BB]. Oh, and if you’re wondering what this transman has to offer, keep reading:

-I’m great at cock worshipping

-I have more holes to fuck than a cisgender man [i.e. a person assigned male at birth who identifies as a man]

-I am a cut, smooth bottom

-My testosterone levels make me insanely horny 24-7

-You get to play with a trannie cock [a little smaller than that of a cisgender man's dick, but much more sensitive]

-I probably won't have a bigger dick than a cisgender man, unless you count the silicone ones I keep in my toolbox

-I'm quite skilled using my silicone cocks

-I have a ton of sexual creativity

-Testosterone tightened up my cunt a little, which provides a cozy ride

Unlike the previous posters, the author of Example 4 describes his genitals in greater detail. However, like the other two authors, he does so while positioning himself as desirable in a male-on-male homoerotic context. Indeed, his description of his genitals is listed as part of "what this transman has to offer" to his sexual mates. Conventionally female-referential genital language appears in Example 4 (e.g., "my cunt") but only alongside claims to masculine embodiment in the form of "a trannie cock," as well as "silicone ones."

In these cases, the veracity of posters' claims to maleness is not framed as conflicting with their possession of "original equipment" or even a "cunt." This coalescence of ostensibly contradictory parts can be understood as a kind of "flexible accumulation" (Harvey, 1998, p. 147) of gendered body elements. A body in possession of a cunt may have not only a cock (which may be "a little smaller" than average but is also "much more sensitive") but also the added versatility of numerous silicone cocks. A cunt, in the right context, is rendered merely another appendage of a sexually skilled male (Leap, 2014).

#### EXAMPLE 5: CRAIGSLIST

Any guys want to flip fuck with a transman? [I was born female, now I am all man except for bonus hole in front.] You must also like getting fucked with my big hard strapon cock.

A final very brief ad from Craigslist further exemplifies the notion of flexible accumulation and the connections between sexual and economic productivity. In Example 5, the poster invokes the term *bonus hole*: a phrase used by some trans men who may prefer to avoid the gendered connotations of words like *cunt*. Despite the brevity of this poster's self-description, he provides the now-familiar caveat that he is "all man," despite his "bonus hole." The author of Example 5 describes his interest in a "guy [who] want[s] to flip fuck with a transman," indicating his versatility as a potential top, who uses his "strapon cock," as well as a potential bottom with a "bonus hole." The meaning of *bonus hole* is literal—it is a bonus, offering sexual value not otherwise provided in a typical homoerotic exchange between men.

#### XTUBE VIDEOS AND TRANS MEN

In the context of visual semiotics, as in the case of trans men in Xtube videos, the process of disclosure is instantaneous because of the ways bodies flexibly accumulate multiple genitals and even identity categories. In these cases, genital difference is not an apparent concern for either those posting the videos or those responding to them. The diegetic content of the vast majority of Xtube videos tagged as including FtMs or trans men generally consist of a close genital framing with audio limited to occasional moaning of the sexual interlocutor(s). Across these texts, the most common descriptors used when referring to trans men's genitals include *cock*, *balls*, *transcock*, *little guy*, and *hole*. Appearing in roughly half of the videos were the terms *cunt*, *pussy*, and *ftm pussy*. Far less common terms include *clit*, *dickclit*, *minicock*, and *trannycock*. The most common terms framing the action of the film include *jerking*, *jacking*, *stroking*, *pumping*, *fisting*, and *rubbing*, many of which evoke normative phallic masturbation.

In these Xtube contexts, as elsewhere, *cock* is commonly used to describe the phallic structure hegemonically understood to be a testosterone-enlarged clitoris. Yet, in the contexts of Xtube videos, where the camera may be situated only at the site of the genitals, with no additional gender markers or cues, the visual does not necessarily contrast with the figurative, as Halberstam (2005) suggests. Instead, the visual here is a function of the figurative. That is, posters' textual framing of the visual provides a template with which to unpack the imagery. We see this in a 90-second video post to Xtube by one user, GayFTM, titled "watch a gay ftm cum." In this video, the camera is tightly focused on his hand masturbating his genitals with a few moans as audio. BigCubJohn, another Xtube user, posts his evaluation on GayFTM's video that is entirely typical. He states that the video poster has a "lovely cock to suck and nice cunt..amazing to watch you cumming at the end..so nice." In this process of co-construction, the hegemony of gender-as-genitals is disrupted. Instead, the unique context and limited narrative capacity of

Xtube allows for counter-hegemonic readings and dialectics of meaning production to emerge. Thus, cocks can be of any size and shape, and men can not only have cunts but also be desirable male sexual subjects.

## CONCLUSIONS: NAVIGATING SEXUAL IDEOLOGY, PRODUCTIVITY, AND DESIRE

This research contributes toward the theorization of trans sexualities in several ways. First, it adds to a small body of knowledge on the erotic practices of trans men and other transmasculine persons who have sex with other men (such as Schleifer, 2006; Vidal-Ortiz, 2005). The invisibility of trans men's sexual engagements with other men is not only a matter of academic significance; as Kenagy and Hsieh (2005) argue, it is precisely this invisibility that forecloses the production of knowledge about trans men's risk for HIV. Second, we bring to this discussion a focus on discourse that reveals the importance of language in constructing both bodily sex and sexual desire. Drawing on CDA and other arms of sociocultural linguistics, we attend both to the micro-level details of trans subjects' linguistic choices as well as the ideological frameworks in which their discourse is situated. Finally, we follow Morrish and Leap (2007) in contextualizing desire as part of a political economy and giving credence to "the material as well as ideological realities through which the desiring subject negotiates desire and subjectivity" (Morrish & Leap, 2007, p. 45).

The trans men and transmasculine persons whose words and images we analyze herein are navigating homoerotic spaces situated in homonormative ideological frameworks in which normative male embodiment plays a key role. In their attempts to overcome hegemonic forces that stigmatize trans embodiment, these individuals highlight their embodied masculinity while simultaneously resignifying their bodily difference. Not only do they refuse to have their sexual productivity undermined by the demands of homonormativity, they deploy linguistic resources that allow them to exhibit a flexible accumulation of eroticized body parts. Their genitals are themselves a source of sexual productivity, providing added value—a *bonus*—in a sexual market of men seeking sex with other men. Yet the linguistic strategies we have identified place trans men in a contradictory relationship with neoliberalism. Even as trans persons may "participate actively in disciplinary techniques that lend meaning to the transsexual body as productive" (Irving, 2008, p. 48) by linguistically embodying homonormative ideals, they do so in ways that may simultaneously recuperate otherwise devalued bodies. Thus even as trans men and transmasculine individuals remain vulnerable to exclusion from productive sexual exchange, some have uncovered strategies for appealing to neoliberal sensibilities in ways that further their own sexual desires.

## NOTES

1. We use *transmasculine* (as in, e.g., Hansbury, 2005) as an umbrella term that indexes a spectrum of identities among individuals who have been assigned “female” at birth but who come to identify as male or with some other masculine-gendered subjectivity.

2. In late July 2012, the American Psychiatric Association, which is responsible for maintaining the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*, announced its intent to change the diagnosis of “gender identity disorder” to “gender dysphoria” in the fifth edition of the manual (*DSM-V*). It is unclear at the time of this writing how this shift from “disorder” to “dysphoria” will impact treatment protocol or established discourses of pathology currently associated with gender transgression.

3. i.e., non-trans.

4. None of the interviewees reported having phalloplasty or any other genital surgery.

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