

“Tumblr Saved My Life”: An Interdisciplinary Investigation of how Black
Trans-Masculinity Operates through Tumblr

by

Shahan D. Bellamy

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved April 2020 by the
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Marlon M. Bailey , Chair
Lisa M. Anderson
Marisa Duarte
C. Riley Snorton

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2020

ABSTRACT

Though the concept of 'transgender' has gained a foothold in American culture, the representation of transgender subjects is both limited and limiting. Media representations of trans experiences generally exclude or negatively depict both trans-masculine people and trans individuals of color. Subsequently, many trans-masculine individuals of color — especially black transmen — turn to online forums to create original content, express what being transgender means to them, and explore topics excluded from mainstream conversations.

Utilizing participatory ethnography influenced by digital and visual approaches, “Tumblr Saved My Life”: An Interdisciplinary Investigation of how Black Trans-Masculinity Operates through Tumblr explores how black transmen articulate racialized trans-masculine experiences via posts, selfies, and hashtags on the social networking site Tumblr. Online observations revealed that Tumblr allows interlocutors an opportunity to ask questions, document physical changes, learn about the lived realities of transgender people of color, and connect with fellow black trans-masculine individuals. In addition to online observation, in-person interviews and observations explored the context for the content interlocutors create, as well as how online articulations of masculinity differ from everyday performances of gender.

Tumblr interactions are important to participants; however, the platform is not where they discuss the more nuanced aspects of being black and transgender. In-person interviews illuminated how black transmen uniquely understand societal erasure as black women prior to starting hormone replacement therapy and experience hyper-visibility as black men after treatment. Specifically, interlocutors note the various forms of racism

they experience, and how those forms change depending on whether their bodies are read as a feminine or masculine. For example, when read and socialized as black girls, participants noted being subjected to sexualization and predation. Conversely, when read and treated as masculine, they gain access to male-only spaces, but face exclusion and suspicion in other contexts.

In short, this work articulates the complex relationship black transmen have to vectors of power, and how they utilize visual images, social media, and technology to present and construct their realities. Ultimately, understanding these experiences can expand the scope of trans studies and feminist theory.

DEDICATION

To the Black trans people everywhere.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS	vi
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
Where's Blackness?: Reviewing Transgender Literature	4
Media Representations of Transgender	7
Queer Theory, Intersectionality, and Feminism	10
Interlocutor Selection and Tumblr as an Ethnographic Site.....	13
Data Types and Methods of Collection	14
2 "IT'S ALMOST LIKE A DIFFERENT TYPE OF DYSPHORIA": THEORIZING NEW UNDERSTANDINGS OF DYSPHORIA	18
Discussions of Gender Dysphoria.....	22
Doing the Work.....	31
A Concluding Thought.....	35
3 "I UNDERSTAND THE STRUGGLE OF BEING A WOMAN": BLACK TRANSMEN, MISOGYNOIR, AND ABJECT LEGIBILITY	37
Why Black Girlhood?	39
Misogynoir: A Theoretical Base.....	41
Tales of Black Girlhood: Church Life, Colorism, and Sexualization	45

	Page
CHAPTER	
4 “I LOVE MY TUMBLR BLOG.”: EXPLORING BLACK DIGITAL TRANS	
EMBODIMENT	72
Expanding Black Flesh	76
The Affordances of Tumblr	79
Selfies and Their Construction	81
Steps of Construction	86
Transing the Hashtag	90
5 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON BLACK TRANS MASCULINITY	101
Future Directions	104
REFERENCES	109

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Figure 1	73
2. Figure 2	74
3. Figure 3.....	87
4. Figure 4.....	89
5. Figure 5.....	91
6. Figure 6.....	98
5. Figure 7.....	98
5. Figure 8.....	99

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Growing up in a majority white rural community in Southern Illinois influenced my understandings and navigations of race, class, gender, and sexuality. In my small town, I was one of two black students and the only openly queer person that I knew. As a result, I spent many days at the community library, utilizing public computers to bond with individuals from similar social locations as mine. Ultimately, the library and digital platforms were my solace and how I survived isolation. These experiences highlighted for me how important technology can be for marginalized individuals, and embedded in me a tradition of utilizing the internet to make my life better. During my teen years, I used Myspace, then Facebook, but it was the introduction of Tumblr into my world during undergrad that caused a seismic shift.

At the time, I did not know any other transgender people of color. King Kunta (KK), a Black transman working on his doctorate in education and living in Oakland, started following me right as I began to take my blog seriously. Like KK, I started my blog as a way to archive my physical transition and educational journey, and as a space to vent about personal strife. I activated my page at a time when I was desperately seeking the queer community that was missing from my life. With the exception of some urban areas, many trans people live in isolation from other transgender and queer communities. This isolation is often compounded for trans individuals of color, who also desire racial kinship in addition to queer companionship. Physical isolation encourages many queer individuals of color to turn to online spaces such as Tumblr for community engagement.

This is particularly true for Black transmasculine people like King Kunta and myself. During my first year of graduate school, we began to video chat regularly, planting the seeds for a mature friendship that lasts today. My relationship with King Kunta and other black transmasculine individuals on Tumblr ignited my interest in exploring: How do black trans-masculinity operate through Tumblr? How do black trans-masculine individuals exploit the features, affordances, and practices of Tumblr to create definitions of black trans-masculinity? How do these definitions influence online and offline formulations of black trans-masculinity? Ultimately, this project explores how black transmasculine people articulate their racialized transgender masculinity via posts, selfies, hashtags, and re-blogs on the social networking site Tumblr, and how that articulation relates to their lived experience of black trans-masculinity. Tumblr as a platform allows black transmen to connect with each other, regardless of their geographic location, and build community.

Prior to starting my transition, I experienced the potential of the internet as a validating and educational experience for trans bodies navigating the medical transition process. Whether it was how to locate a doctor, compare different brands of testosterone, or understand the rate of physical changes, everything I learned about transitioning I learned on the internet. Surfing across many websites, I was repeatedly presented with thoroughly researched and cited information, collected and archived independently by individuals or groups. The majority of these sites contain a section of links to other websites that also feature information valuable to transgender individuals. Cissexist societies ignore the needs and desires of transgender communities, and these websites

work as a digital railroad by connecting transgender individuals to highly needed resources.¹

As technology and social media have seemingly monopolized every aspect of human life, information previously only found on transitioning websites is now available on platforms such as YouTube, Tumblr, Twitter, and Facebook. The use of new platforms not only increases the dissemination of knowledge, but also shifts the types of discussions occurring around trans issues. The inclusion of video, animation, and photography, combined with these websites' mission of social interaction, allows trans communities to express their needs and interests while connecting with one another in new ways. Whereas other formats were clinical in nature and focused on doctor information and drug types, websites such as Tumblr and YouTube present the trans community an opportunity to focus on the emotional and material needs of the community.

As I continued my transition, online spaces provided much solace for me. My small Midwestern college town presented me with little queer/transgender community interaction. My interactions with trans content consisted of various episodes of Jerry Springer, Oprah's interview with Thomas Beatie 'The Pregnant Man,' and the character of Max from *The L Word*. These representations, especially the story of Max, provided me with a very skewed view of what it meant to be transgender. Tumblr in particular provided me with access to other black trans masculine individuals. For more than eight years, my network has grown to include a diverse group of black trans people, with many

¹ Cissexism represents systems put in place to maintain the gender binary, and to as specifically benefit those who are not transgender (see Julia Serano's definition of cissexism and cis-privilege).

of my online relationships extending into the material world. My relationships from Tumblr inspired me, like many academics, to draw on my personal life as a subject of scholarly exploration. I knew the numerous ways that interacting with other black trans masculine individuals changed my life, but I wanted to know how other transmen utilized their blogs and what that can tell us about larger questions pertaining to gender, race, sexuality, and power.

Where's Blackness?: Reviewing Transgender Literature

When discussing the possibilities for transgender studies, Susan Stryker (1998) claims “as a field, transgender studies promises to offer important new insights into such fundamental questions as how bodies mean or what constitutes human personhood” (155). Without question, the field has accomplished this. However, academic articulations of transgender can also present a generic account of trans experiences. Besides helping to formulate meanings about trans, the academy provides suggestions (both implicitly and explicitly) on how to *be* transgender. The current tendencies of transgender studies can fall into a few common patterns, such as defining transgender, examining physical transition, and discussing social abjection.

Articulations of ‘transgender’ are a recent phenomenon, and vary setting to setting. Virginia Prince first used the term ‘transgenderists’ in 1969 to describe individuals interested in passing and being polite (Ekins and King 2008, 230). However, it was not until the 80s and 90s that several scholars brought forth texts that helped reconceptualize common understandings of transgender as a phenomenon (see Haraway 1984; 2004, Stone 1992, Bornstein 1994, Halberstam 1998). Leslie Fienberg’s *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come* (1992) helped showcase

the fluctuating and contextual nature of transgender. Specifically, Fienberg's honest discussion regarding hir struggle to occupy traditional gender categories helped individuals recognize the need for various articulations of trans. Fienberg's work helped expand transgender into the umbrella term/subjectivity we recognize it as today, with many recognizing 'transgender' as encompassing any and all possible gender variations (Stryker 2008, 19).

As time continued, scholars began to explore the relationship between medical transition and what it means to be trans. Many of these texts focus on transsexuality and the process of bodily alteration. Bernice Hausman's *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology, and the Idea of Gender* (1995) problematically conflates gender and sex while forwarding the claim that technological advances and the ability to alter the materiality of the body are what formally produce a transsexual subjectivity. In a similar manner, Jay Prosser attempts to understand the desire to transition. Specifically, in *Second Skins* (1998), he ponders "what does transsexuality, that fact that subjects do seek radically to change their sex, convey about sex, identity, and the flesh?" (63). While Prosser's work engages transsexuality with more nuance than Hausman, his claim that "transsexuals continue to deploy the image of wrong embodiment because being trapped in the wrong body is simply what transsexuality feels like" (69) needs further contextualization. All individuals experience dysphoria at some point in life (Dolezal 2015), and Prosser's argument could benefit from a phenomenological approach that explicitly articulates the uniqueness of dysphoria related to trans embodiment.

Several scholars have specifically examined the experiences of trans-masculine individuals. Devor (1999), Cromwell (1998), and Rubin (2003) all attempt to examine the

social location of FTMs. Henry Rubin's *Self-Made Men: Identity and Embodiment Among Transsexual Men* (2003) employs a phenomenological approach, and concludes that transmen feel a sense of an "essentialized self" while recognizing social constructionist arguments of gender formation (144). Rubin's work challenges feminist and Foucauldian scholarship that states there is no 'true self' in the body. Furthermore, Rubin's contribution highlights a quagmire present in many texts regarding transgender embodiment: How does one articulate a feeling of being transgender without falling into reductionist claims of the body?

Gayle Salomon's work provides a roadmap to potentially answering this. In *Assuming A Body* (2010), Salomon utilizes Freud's 'bodily ego' and Merleau-Ponty's 'sexual schema' to highlight the potential for a marriage between phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and transgender studies. Salomon specifically argues that phenomenology and psychoanalysis can "help us understand transgender bodies as embodying a specificity that is finally not reducible to the material" (8). Phenomenology insists on a centering of bodily experience, while recognizing historical and social contexts, which allows trans individuals to focus on physical experiences without essentializing. Finally, a review of transgender literature would be remiss without acknowledging the work of Dean Spade (2010), Susan Stryker (2008), and Judith Butler (2004), who interrogate the discursive, historical, and performative nature of gender and its role in forming notions of legibility. All the aforementioned scholars' work showcases the need for expanded explorations of trans embodiment, particularly racialized trans experiences.

Bobby Noble's 2011 review of *The Transgender Studies Reader (TSR)* sums up the major problem within transgender studies. Noble explains that *TSR* is an extremely

practical, one-stop collection that captures the pulse of the field; however, it also has an unplanned effect of over-determining the lived experiences of multiple trajectories through limited points of view. In this case, *The Transgender Studies Reader* communicates the singular story of a subject emerging only through dominant western frameworks (Noble 2011, 258). Though these works never explicitly state a correct way to embody trans, the lack of trans scholarship focusing on non-western, non-white subjects implicitly implies that trans is to be synonymous with white, western, medically transitioned subjects.

Media Representations of Transgender

Presently, narrative representations of transgender individuals are numerically low, often negative, and usually centered on white middle-aged characters. These characters are often portrayed by a non-trans actor and focus on the experiences of transwomen. Prime examples of this include Felicity Huffman in *TransAmerica* (2005), Jared Leto in *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013), and Jeffery Tambor in *Transparent* (2014). The few representations that do focus on transmen still concentrate on white characters and often showcase how marginalized they are in their communities. The film *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) and the characters of Max on the show *The L Word* (2004) and Cole of *The Fosters* (2015) serve as exemplars. The continued portrayal of transgender characters by non-trans actors perpetuates the notion that transwomen and transmen are similar to drag queens/kings and are simply 'men in dresses' or confused butch women.

Similarly, documentary films and reality television shows that feature actual trans subjects frequently focus on why characters transition, how they go about obtaining hormones, and how their bodies change in reaction to hormone therapy. *Southern*

Comfort (2001), *Transgeneration* (2005), *Transparent* (2005) and most recently *I Am Cait* (2015) are all examples. The focus on physical transition and the bodies of trans people is fascinating to viewers, but often erases the various material needs of the trans community. The current trans media landscape helps create a type of trans-normativity that centers around white, cis-passing individuals. Trans individuals who gain attention usually present as hyper feminine or hyper masculine, and these mainstream narratives of transgender experiences, whether intentionally or not, often limit the definition of what trans can be while disregarding the experiences of black trans people.

Some would disagree that there is a lack of representation featuring trans people of color in the media. Black trans women who have gained fame, such as actress Laverne Cox of *Orange Is The New Black* and Janet Mock, bestselling author of *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love and So Much More* (2014), are often highlighted as indicators of progress and tolerance towards trans bodies. However, upon further scrutiny we can see that there is something peculiar about their presence. As noted, most fictive trans representations depict white characters who are portrayed by non-trans actors. Yet, these Black trans women have become synonymous with public trans politics. Why is this the case? This is not an attack on the women mentioned or the important and courageous work they do. However, their public presence does reveal ongoing normalization projects of trans identity which are connected to dominant understandings of masculinity and femininity. The public presence of Cox and Mock become representational of transgender politics while the lived realities of transgender people of color are obscured.

Julia Serano (2007) notes that the media's persistent depictions of hyper feminine transwomen are a part of larger fetishization projects. Transwomen are consistently shown performing acts such as putting on make-up, not because they are viewed as legitimate women, but because it allows audiences to witness common tropes associated with femininity. This in turn positions femininity as contrived. Audiences' fascination with the feminization of trans women is connected to the larger issue of sexualization of all women (Serano 2007, 43-45). A desire for the phallus, on the other hand, is seen as natural. Therefore, the experiences of transmen cannot be sensationalized by media outlets in the same way – not without also calling into question the malleability of masculinity. However, the presence and superficial inclusion of trans women of color into the public conscious allows a progressive narrative to manifest. Lisa Duggan (2002) explains that queer movements have always dealt with internal dilemmas of assimilation or resistance. Following September 11th, marriage equality became the ultimate signifier of progress for gay individuals (Duggan 2002, 180). However, now that marriage equality has been 'achieved,' transgender politics are now the new measure of equality. Famous trans women of color signify progress without the masses having to interrogate the systemic violence done to the transgender community as a whole.

Though I am interested in the numerous ways that hegemonic institutions can appropriate marginality for their own benefit, it is not my primary focus. Nor am I interested in casting any type of blame upon those I have deemed 'token.' Instead, I invest in the contribution I can make to help fight said appropriation by illuminating stories that provide a means to more fully understand trans experiences — in particular, by acknowledging and embracing the interconnected nature of gender and race. Enoch

Page and Matt Richardson (2006) note that “most feminist theory and Queer Theory lacks insight into how race provides opportunities for White trans subjects to “come out” in ways not available to black transsubjectivity” (69). Consequently, I argue for a shifting and expansion of the paradigm away from current, normative enunciations of transness and instead choose to explore the lives of black transmen.

Let me be clear, this work is not merely invested in changing media landscapes to also include transgender men. Nor am I advocating for a shifting of attention away from transgender women and the very real and dangerous struggles they face. Instead, I am encouraging an expansion of the perspectives that we consider when attempting to formulate ever-changing articulations of transgender. There is a correlation between how people are theorized about in the academy, how they are represented in the media, and how they are treated in their everyday lives. When it comes to transness, there is something peculiar happening during this dialogic process that excludes the voices and perspectives of transmen, especially transmen of color.

Queer Theory, Intersectionality, and Feminism

It would only make sense that a project concerning black masculine experience would utilize the tenets of queer theory (QT). Queer theory’s mission is to dismantle and disrupt knowledges often thought to be common sense. Over time, the burgeoning field of transgender studies has helped to expand the scope of content that queer theorists explore. Additionally, scholars such as sociologist Rodrick Ferguson (2005) help expand QT to also consider how race connects with sexuality, gender, and the state. Ferguson draws from black feminist thought in combination with queer theory because it “insist(s) on the historical specificity and heterogeneity of “sexuality,” a specificity and

heterogeneity denoted as racial difference” (86). His work helps form new racialized understandings of gender and sexuality that deviate from traditional Foucauldian schools of thought. The successful execution of this project depends on following Ferguson’s, as well as other queer theorists’, example of considering the complex nature of subject formation and its relation to state regulation.

In addition to queer theory, an intersectional approach is imperative for my work. Feminist scholar Vivian May (2015) notes that intersectionality “has substantially shifted how we conceptualized individuals’ and groups’ identities, craft and sustain political alliances, and examine and transform systems of inequality” (1). Without a doubt, intersectionality is one of the greatest tools available to scholars. Utilizing intersectional thinking is especially useful when working with multiply marginalized communities, such as black transmen. The experiences of my interlocutors are not one-dimensional, and producing work that fully interrogates subjectivity requires a continued acknowledgment that one’s social locations cannot and should not be separated from one another (Bowleg 2012, 756). The racism they experience is not detached from moments of transphobia, and intersectionality allows me to fully contend with this complexity.

It is also important that I approach this work with a phenomenological orientation. Phenomenology as a theory and method is used to explore phenomena expressly from the perspective of being and embodiment (Ahmed 2006). Often studies concerning transgender experience rely on a ‘felt sense’ of the body (Cromwell 1999, Rubin 2009). This felt sense is then used to evoke the ‘realness’ of transgender experience (Prosser 1998). However, as noted, these articulations often reify binaries they wish to dismantle. A phenomenological orientation toward transgender experience emphasizes embodiment

while allowing for a conversation of the ways a felt sense is a result of, and subject to, cultural interpretation (Salamon 2010, 2-10). Furthermore, phenomenology “can help us understand transgendered bodies as embodying a specificity that is finally not reducible to the material” (Salamon 2010, 8). Phenomenology is important because it allows for a discussion of embodied experiences such as dysphoria without essentializing. Stated another way, phenomenological thinking lends me, as well as other trans scholars, an avenue to simultaneously articulate that interlocutors intrinsically feel transgender, and that formulations of transgender are culturally and socially generated.

In addition to approaching this work using phenomenology, I incorporate the scholarship and practices of digital and visual ethnography into my study. Somatechnic studies explores the relationship between humans and technology. Instead of framing technology as a passive object that humans use, somatechnics encourages a viewpoint recognizing the mutually invested nature of both parties. Humans utilize technology, just as technology needs humanity. The term was coined by conference organizers of the 2003 *Body Modification: Changing Bodies, Changing Selves*, and the 2005 *Body Modification Mark II* meetings “in an attempt to highlight the inextricability of soma and techné, of ‘the body’ and the techniques in and through which corporealities are formed and transformed” (Sullivan & Murray 2009, 3). Positivist traditions view the body as an ahistorical and pre-social formation that brings forth technology, not the other way around (Lettow 2011, 110). In this way, somatechnics confronts Cartesian dualistic frames of thought that reject technology’s ability to inform the limits of materiality and embodiment (Pugliese & Stryker 2009). Ultimately, somatechnics helps conceptualize “a body changed by technologies into another body; another type of body; a body become; a

body enfleshing a particular mode of somatechnological being” (Lodder 2009, 191).

Understanding this, I view corporeality as always already technological, and approach questions of power, racism, and transphobia with this mindset.

Interlocutor Selection and Tumblr as an Ethnographic Site

In order to recruit interlocutors for this project, I first placed a public post on my personal Tumblr page in June of 2017 asking black trans-masculine individuals who were interested in participating in my research to reach out to me via email. Individuals who identify as transgender, transmasculine, female-to-male transsexual, agender, or transgender non-binary were all encouraged to participate. The initial call to participate expressed that individuals who think they would be a good fit for the study but who did not identify with one of the listed categories should still respond.

I chose Tumblr as a site of observation for a few reasons. As stated, there is a vibrant community of black transgender people who engage in various conversations and forms of community engagement. Additionally, the infrastructure and features of Tumblr are different from other blog and social networking websites. While websites such as Wordpress.com allow users to create at-length written blog posts, Tumblr is a micro-blogging social media website that allows users to post and share various media content at a rapid pace. Moreover, Tumblr separates posting options into categories of text post, videos, gifs, audio, photos, and links. In addition, Tumblr makes anonymity more possible for many users than other social networks or traditional blogging platforms. Users may not be who they claim or look like their profile pictures. While this might seem deceptive, it also provides unique opportunities for multiply marginalized subjects to unabashedly call out the oppression they experience and to connect without the fear of

violence. Often marginalized bodies have to endure the burden of not being able to address daily microaggressions for fear of being reprimanded or thought of as overly sensitive by bosses, associates, and colleagues. However, anonymized blogging allows users to dispel dominant narratives and to brazenly express their frustrations with systematic oppression, without having to take into account the feelings of their privileged counterparts.

The scope of this dissertation primarily discusses subversive moments of recognition found on Tumblr; however, it is important to note there are just as many users who turn to the site for nonpolitical endeavors. “Fandoms,” or online fan communities, for shows such as *Supernatural*, *Scandal*, and *Dr. Who* exist alongside social activism on Tumblr. ‘The Beehive’ (the fans of Beyoncé) and hordes of One Direction fans also occupy space on Tumblr. These fans create original written content and drawings, and engage in intense conversations about their interests. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that Tumblr is not divorced from dominant capitalist interests. Many users utilize the space as a tool for marketing their own music or products. “Sponsored posts,” created by companies to sell products, repeatedly and sporadically appear on the website. Often, the appearance of these posts can seem incoherent or disjointed from the content being created by everyday users. Understanding the broad range of content hosted on the site is important in order to provide a comprehensive and nuanced picture of the workings of Tumblr.

Data Types and Methods of Collection

A large portion of my data came from Tumblr blog posts. I collected screenshots from Tumblr posts to try and understand how interlocutors display their experiences on

the site. Each interlocutors' blog contained extensive amounts of data in the form of reblogs and original posts. As a result, I only collected content that related to blackness and issues of transgender experience. While examining posts, I collected screenshots and data regarding several components of the post. Specially, I noted the hashtags used, which tags were used frequently, how tags were grouped together, and in what order tags appeared. In addition to hashtags, I examined the content of photographs and the captions used to describe images.

Interlocutors were assigned specific days of the week where I observed their Tumblr activity. Participants' day of observation remained the same every week. For example, on Tuesdays I observed TJ's blog, while on Wednesdays I examined Alex's. In order to ensure I resumed observation at the same place, I concluded each observation session by noting the date, time, and a short description of the last post I encountered. Additionally, for each interlocutor I created a digital folder that contained screenshots from digital observation, audio recordings of interviews, memos pertaining to that person, final transcripts, etc.

While digital observation helped me understand how interlocutors utilize Tumblr, it did not provide direct insight into users' posting process and the circumstances they encounter when constructing content. For this reason, I supplemented Tumblr observations with ethnographic interviews. Interviewing users provided direct insight into how they understood their participation on Tumblr. As a feminist scholar, I value subjugated knowledges and desired to speak with as many other black transmen as possible, so as to not center my own understandings. I developed behavior, opinion, and

sensory questions that probed how interlocutors constructed and felt about their Tumblr participation.

I conducted six total ethnographic interviews across the United States with: TJ, 19, an undergrad at the University of Connecticut; Duane, 21, a Toledo native and history student at the University of Toledo; King Kunta, 26, a doctoral candidate from Oakland; Kai, 21, a film student at Georgia State; Zaire, 21, a fine arts major at Syracuse University; and Alex, 27, the manager of a sex shop in Phoenix. Based on the generosity of my interlocutors, I was able to cultivate an analysis that not only expands transgender studies scholarship by revealing the knowledges of transmen, but also continues the political traditions of gender studies by observing and scrutinizing systematic gendered violence. In addition, this work maintains the intellectual integrity of black studies by highlighting the intersections of race, class, and gender.

I aim to accomplish four important goals in this project. The first, accomplished in chapter one, is to rearticulate dysphoria as not an inherently internal feeling, but as an emotional response to external stimuli directed at black transgender embodiment. Specifically, I examine how dysphoria materializes outside of gender to reveal new insights into racialized dysphoria. The second goal of the project, presented in chapter two, is to utilize queer of color critique, intersectionality, and feminist theory to examine the prevalence of misogyny and misogynoir. Black transmen's experiences are unique because they understand societal erasure as black women prior to starting hormone replacement therapy and experience hyper-visibility as black men after treatment. Specifically, I explore interlocutors' girlhoods and their impact on their understanding,

construction, and performance of masculinity. This reveals new insights into how misogyny/misogynoir is experienced, but also how it is perpetuated.

Chapter three drives toward my third goal which is to queer, or destabilize, taken-for-granted notions of bodies by articulating black transgender digital embodiment. I take the collective knowledge discussed in chapters one and two and use it to understand how and why interlocutors utilize Tumblr. Recognizing Tumblr as an integral component of recognition and validation for black trans-masculine individuals forces us to reconsider the conceptual separation between body and digital platform in order to fully imagine the possibilities of black trans-masculine existence. Finally, in the conclusion, I seek to influence conceptualizations and possibilities for contemporary and future iterations of black masculinity. The experiences revealed by interlocutors provide all masculine individuals an opportunity to learn ways of being kinder masculine beings.

CHAPTER 2

“IT'S ALMOST LIKE A DIFFERENT TYPE OF DYSPHORIA”: THEORIZING NEW UNDERSTANDINGS OF DYSPHORIA

Bradley University, Peoria, Illinois, September 2010

“Where my hoes at? Hmm...Where my hoes at?” I enthusiastically yelled while throwing my hands up in a “gangster” pose. I stood at the end of a long stage in one of the event spaces on campus. As I inquired about “my hoes,” several of the girls from my dorm floor ran up to the stage and pretended to be my fans. They screamed in excitement as I leaned down to give each of them attention. The performance was a part of a campus-wide drag competition. The previous week, each residence hall had held a dorm-wide competition, sending the best woman and man impersonators to the campus wide event to represent them. In the Wyckoff Hall competition, I — a tomboy lesbian at the time — and a fabulous Joan Rivers impersonator from the second floor had easily advanced to the final competition.

On the day of the show, I wore a faded blue button down with white stripes and a thick patterned tie with hues of brown, gray, and tan that I got from a Goodwill store. Before the show, the girls on my floor loaded my hair with gel to slick down the slides, creating a pathetic mohawk that curls instead of standing up straight. Using eyeliner, they took turns drawing a thin chinstrap on my face, followed by an asymmetrical goatee. Ultimately, I looked ridiculous and I did not win the grand prize: a fifty-dollar gift card to Barnes and Noble.

Even though I lost the competition, I enjoyed how it felt, and my participation eventually became the catalyst that helped me realize I wanted to transition. My

performance helped me gain a new self-understanding — but it also, in retrospect, revealed a lot about my understanding of black masculinity as a college freshman. I did not think critically about gender or race at the time. I knew I was a masculine girl, that I was gay and liked women. It would take enrolling in gender studies courses to help me develop into a reflexive person and move beyond my overly simplistic understanding of racialized gendered experiences as the opposite of white masculinity and femininity.

Some of the limitations of my perspective can be attributed to the context in which I grew up. Without perpetuating tropes about the importance of men teaching their sons to be men, I never spent significant time with men during my formative years. It was always me and my mother, and the majority of my understandings of masculinity thus stemmed from media articulations and church personifications of how men and women should behave. So as a college freshman, I did not think to perform in the drag show differently, because I did not know other ways of being masculine. After losing the contest, I found out from a judge that it was my performance of a stereotypical black masculinity — one that viewed women as ‘hoes’ that belonged to me — that impacted their decision.

But, even with this information, I did not reflect on or alter my perception of black masculinity. I still held these beliefs when I went to acquire hormones seven months after the competition. At that appointment, I lied to the doctor and told him I had been living socially as a man for nine months. This statement was false. I had discussed my desire to transition with my therapist; however, I never received any therapy directly related to gender performance and socially transitioning. As noted in the introduction, I

completed extensive research regarding hormonal transition, and I naively believed I knew everything there was to know about living as someone interpolated as a man.

While I do not believe it is necessary for people to follow the regulations set by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH), it would have helped me to spend more time actively thinking and talking about how my life was going to change after hormones. Specifically, I think it would have been beneficial to talk with other black trans people, as well as allies, about what it means to be a black masculine person. Doing so would have helped me to reflect on, and better understand the impact of the socio-political formations of black masculinity in this country.

Before medical transition, I did not experience dysphoria in the traditional ways commonly associated with trans experiences. Unlike some of my interlocutors, I never had a desire to transition as a child or in my teenage years, nor did I have negative feelings about my body. I didn't hate going through puberty. If anything, I did not consciously think about gender or my body at all. Instead, I conflated my sexuality and being a tomboy as my gender.

As a result of my past experiences, dysphoria did not become a part of my life until after I started hormonal transition. While I conducted extensive research regarding transitioning, I focused on the details surrounding bodily changes. My research did not present me with information on how to navigate the world as a person read as a black man. I mistakenly assumed I would be treated by society like the white trans men whose videos I watched on YouTube. Typically, gender dysphoria is thought of a hatred of one's body as it pertains to gender, but as I learned based on conversations with interlocutors, race can — and often does — shape bodily interpretations of dysphoria.

Specifically, interlocutors note experiencing dysphoria not as a solely gendered discomfort, but as a result of starting to pass as black masculine people. It is the particular racism they experience in a specific social context, not any personal disconnect from their individual bodies, that forms dysphoria.

Academic conversations about dysphoria typically start and stop around sexuality and gender; however, if we examine the conditions under which black transmasculine, as well as gender non-conforming people, live, we see white supremacy creating quotidian forms of racialized dysphoria. These everyday iterations of dysphoria contribute to the conditions that leave the majority of black trans people in social, economic, and political peril. At the time of my drag performance, I did not conceptualize any of these formations, nor did I recognize them as the springboard for me seeking the black transmasculine community I would come to find on Tumblr. However, this chapter's goal is to highlight the societal conditions that foreground the labor that interlocutors do on Tumblr. In short, chapters one and two work together to provide context to understand the conditions in which interlocutors live, and how these conditions bear upon their Tumblr practices.

To accomplish this, I start by discussing commonly held understandings of gender dysphoria. Next, I situate the cultural, social, political, and economic conditions of black trans masculinity in the United States. Importantly, I note how these conditions produce forms of racialized dysphoria. I end the chapter by arguing for the generative and radical notion that dysphoria can and does serve as an analytical tool of surviving and thriving.

Discussions of Gender Dysphoria

Often confused with feelings, emotions are time-limited reactions to external or internal events. This includes feelings, but also physiological responses such as sweating and increased heart rate and brain activity. As an emotion, dysphoria is conceptualized as “a state of depression, restlessness, anxiety, discontent, irritability, or feeling unwell or unhappy” (Reevy et. al, 2010). Gender dysphoria, a psychiatric condition (previously known as gender identity disorder) is “a conflict between a person’s physical or assigned gender and the gender with which he/she/they identify” (American Psychiatric Association). There is much controversy regarding the categorization of gender dysphoria as a psychiatric ailment, as well as intra-communal debates about whether trans people have to feel dysphoria in order to be transgender in an ontological sense.

However, the traditionally accepted construction of dysphoria as an emotional response to gendered discomfort is rarely questioned. The danger in this limited definition is multilayered. One, it helps reify the notion that transgender experience is “all in your head” and thus not real. Two, it omits how racism, ableism, xenophobia, etc., can and do collide to materialize a vast range of experiences of dysphoria outside of gender. Importantly, I am not saying that dysphoria is not rooted in materiality or is not an emotion. Instead, I am arguing that it is an emotion that takes shape in response to external conditions/stimuli. Dysphoria is and remains a deeply personal and internal experience; however, this chapter demands an attunement to the external forces that spark it.

One alternate approach to understanding dysphoria, a phenomenological conceptualization presents it as an effect of being out of place or time, a disruption from

flow. Sara Ahmed (2010) explains that, “A flow is an effect of bodies that are going the same way. To go is also to gather. A flow can be an effect of gatherings of all kinds: gatherings of tables, for instance, as kinship objects that support human gatherings.” In this way, we can understand flows that coalesce around race, gender, ability, or class. Ahmed further states that, when it comes to flow, “for some, you have to become insistent to be the recipient of a social action, you might have to announce your presence, wave your arm, saying: “Here I am!” For others, it is enough just to turn up because you have already been given a place at the table before you take up your place.” It is marginalized persons, such as my interlocutors, who have to do the work of yelling “Here I am!” The critical concept of flow is amenable to theorizations put forward by transgender studies scholar Talia Mae Bettcher, who’s work encompasses multiple lines of thought/social structures, opening up new ways of thinking about dysphoria.

Talia Mae Bettcher (2014) explains that theoretical definitions of gender dysphoria, and thus conceptualizations of trans, are based on a model in which someone is “trapped in the wrong body” (Bettcher, 2014, 383). Bettcher acknowledges that some trans individuals have attempted the opposite with beyond-the-binary models of gender; however, she also explains that neither of these models “provides a way to theorize trans women as subject to sexual oppression (as women) and transphobic oppression (as trans) in ways that are fully blended” (387). Instead, current articulations of gender dysphoria reinforce patriarchal standards of gender, by taking commonly held meanings of gender for granted, which forecloses on new possibilities of gender (390). For Bettcher, understanding this dynamic helps deconstruct the ways trans people, especially trans

women, are coerced into certain articulations and performances of gender in what she calls “reality enforcement.”

We can think about the constraints of white supremacy and racialized dysphoria in similar ways. Bettcher argues that cissexism presents cisgender as a stable category, one that can be obtained. Similarly, white supremacy presents whiteness as a stable category to be obtained. As emotions are time-bound reactions to external or internal events, gender dysphoria is an individual reaction to the external and internal events of cissexism. White supremacy shapes this experience, too, by projecting particular forms of black masculinity that create racialized dysphoria.

Two quick notes before discussing the historical construction of black masculinity. First, I am aware that trans-misogynoir accounts for the particular social location of black trans women, and the role of racism and transphobia plays in their lives; however, that concept does not encapsulate the specific ways that white supremacy enacts modes of existence that cause racialized dysphoria, regardless of gender and sexuality. Second, white individuals cannot experience racialized dysphoria, as . whiteness has, historically, been the dominant race.

Oakland, California, 10:30 am, October 13, 2017

Seven years after my freshman year drag show performance, I am awkwardly standing on a sidewalk, looking to my right and to my left. There’s a row of cars parked on the street in front of me, and I debate whether or not I should stand in the street to make it easier for my friend to see me. I take a deep breath to calm my anxiety and decide the sidewalk is sufficient. It is Friday the thirteenth, and the city looks the part. It’s windy, the sky is gray, the air is muggy, and the temperature below-average. If I look

closely enough, I can see particles of ash floating in the air. My eyes burn, my throat hurts, and I resent the Northern California wildfires for burning during my visit. Before my body initiates an asthma attack, a black two-door Chevy truck whips around the corner. It stops in front of me, the passenger door flies open, and I'm greeted with a cheerful: "Hey, fam! Get in here!" I hop in the truck, King Kunta (KK) smiles at me, and our weekend together begins.

King Kunta, as he has deemed himself for this project, originally from Southern California but now residing in Oakland, is a 26 year old who describes himself as "nomadic." A third year doctoral candidate in education, he speeds off and takes us to his soon to be former residence. I help him move boxes and various possessions from a small room in the back of a West Oakland house. Though this is our first time meeting in the flesh, we talk as the old friends we are. After years of digital intimacy, there is no awkwardness present. We reward our physical labor with pizza from Arizmendi's, and he drives me around so I can see the Pixar campus in person. I help him unload his belongings in his new, larger room, in a house eclectically called Butter Chaos. Filled with house plants, mix-match art, and recovered wood furniture, Butter Chaos became the backdrop to a weekend filled with laughter and sacrosanct conversation.

In his new room, with a Jack and Jill bathroom to be shared with one of several roommates, I learn of his childhood spent in foster care. He tells me that he still considers himself the sibling of "all the fosters – 400,000 at least, at any moment." Throughout the weekend, I discover that spending $\frac{3}{4}$ of his life in the California foster care system is one of the most salient aspects of his being. King Kunta is generous and discusses many topics with me, including: his sexuality, his conceptualizations of blackness, and how he

came to Tumblr. Within these various conversations, I learn how his treatment as a black man at work, on campus, and by roommates makes the intersection of his race and gender an extremely salient aspect of his being.

Historically, black masculinity has been presented as a problem to be dealt with instead of an arena of possibility (Neal 2013). Several factors contribute to this view of black masculinity; in the United States, geography plays a strong role. In the South, black masculinity is reduced to tropes of Uncle Tom, rapist, and gangsta. Conversely, black men of the North have been positioned as smarter urban hustlers residing in ghettos (Richardson 2007). Richardson explains North/South binaries that position Northern black men over Southern men are harmful, because they help perpetuate logics of white supremacy. According to Richardson, the distinction was created to cause division within Black communities and perpetuate the myth that one could get closer to whiteness based on location, job, or even accent. Moreover, these stereotypes spill over to several parts of the country, regardless of where black men actually reside.

Bryant Keith Alexander (2006) further scrutinizes binaries placed on black masculinity and introduces the concept of ‘good man-bad man.’ Alexander explains that, when it comes to race there is a double standard of what is considered good and bad, and for whom. Black men are stereotyped as violent and savage individuals. On the other hand, when similar characteristics are displayed by white men, they are labeled as ‘bad boys’ and their behavior is “often projected as power, interpreted as strength, and used to mark difference and assert control” (88). The black man’s body is always labeled as a problem and never a person. Conversely, Alexander notes the “good man” is also a form of “entrapment” (88), because it requires black men to live up to white standards and

never deviate from them. If black men do deviate, they risk no longer ‘passing’ in hegemonic society.

Alexander defines ‘passing’ as: “a means of maintaining cultural membership ... as well as the conscious and unconscious choice to engage other performances that situate racial identity” (72). For all Black men, both transgender and non-transgender, limiting social roles — particularly when paired with the pressure to ‘pass’ — make it extremely difficult to construct “an identity and image that is reflexive and representative of who we are and wish to be” (Richardson 2006, 90). Throughout this history of mistreatment, black masculine bodies have simultaneously been disavowed and sexualized, in ways that leave them both othered and desired (Nagel 2003). Interlocutors are aware of this historical legacy and contradiction, as well as the impact it has on their lives, and my conversations with them highlight the manner in which racialized dysphoria materializes.

For instance, King Kunta draws on this historical legacy — as well as his knowledge that his body is interpolated as a cisgender black man’s — when we discuss how he is treated in society. “How did you anticipate that people would treat you after you started hormones?” I ask. He provides an in-depth answer:

Oh, that was something that was really just tough to predict 'cause it's like you don't know what it's like to be someone else until you're someone else, you know? So yeah, I guess I didn't anticipate as much coldness, I guess, 'cause as a black person, there's certain people that don't like black people, and then if you're read as a black woman, there's obviously layers to that. People who don't like women, people who don't like black women, people who don't like black people and women, you know, whatever, or maybe people who don't like black people but like women, so it's just weird shit, and then when you're a black dude, you're moved to a totally different spot on the board but the only thing that's in common

is black, but then you get male privilege but it's like you also get certain distinct dangers if you're read as a black man.

KK's answer is revelatory for a few reasons. First, he explains the societal treatment he experienced after transitioning as feeling like being perceived as someone else. His overall understanding of himself has not shifted; however, dominant notions of secondary sex characteristics cause his body to be viewed in a new way, resulting in him being in a "totally different spot on the board." Furthermore, his verbiage showcases an understanding that, while blackness is a commonality, not all black people are treated the same as it pertains to gendered experiences. Specifically, he recognizes "distinct dangers" that come with black masculinity, telling me:

So that was something to adjust to, it's just interesting how that plays out. It's just funny 'cause I identify as a gentle person, and I think the things I do are pretty gentle, you know what I'm saying, in terms of, besides the weight lifting and that type of stuff, which is kinda like typically machismo, which is my peaceful shit, you know? I don't know, adrenaline shit ... Yeah, my shit I do is pretty gentle, and just low-key, and quiet, yeah, kinda soft I guess, so it's just weird to be read as violent and dangerous, or whatever, whatever. Like the shit that's associated with blackness and masculinity. But yeah, that was obviously not something easy or simple to predict, but yeah.

King Kunta knows that he is read as violent just because of his blackness and his masculinity. Importantly, he notes that was not something he had anticipated in the lead up to medically transitioning.

Other interlocutors express similar feelings as KK. As Duane explains to me, "People try to pigeon hole it a little bit when it comes to being a black man. If you are a black man, you are this. You can't be a little feminine, you can't be soft." Similar to King Kunta, Duane roots these restrictions in systematic stereotypes of black masculinity. He pointedly states, "Because as black men, we are targets and we're always going to be

targets.” Duane and KK’s statements illustrate the power of the process of interpolation, particularly as it pertains to black masculine bodies. Being viewed as a threat and a problem to society causes racialized dysphoria to metastasize in quotidian ways.

For instance, Alex, 27 from Phoenix tells me, “It happened a year or so after I started T, I was walking off to the light rail. I was walking somewhere and there was this white lady in front of me and I realized that she was walking faster to get away from me. And I’m like, “Oh. Yeah.” Here, in his everyday act – getting off the light rail — Alex realizes that his body’s interpolation, one rooted in specific historical legacies, ignites fear in others. In this moment of racialized dysphoria, Alex is not feeling a disconnect from his racialized gendered self because *he* does not like his body. Instead, his sensation of discomfort stems from the racism and fear emanating off of the white women in front of him. Her fear disrupts him from the flow of his commute. Wanting to know the emotional impact of this encounter, I ask, “How did that make you feel?” He explains, “People are afraid of me now. I’m a threat to white women. I am that person they’re afraid of raping them in a dark alley. That fucking sucks.” The perceptions of women are not the only thing Alex has had to adjust to. “I realized I can’t talk to kids anymore,” he tells me. Alex grew up working in his church’s nursery and further explains, “I love little kids...and it’s even creepy to say that now, because I’m a dude now.” People do not know Alex’s background and why he enjoys children. Instead, once he identified as trans-masculine and read as cisgender, he was expected to perform by society’s notions of black masculinity.

Explaining quotidian moments he is interrupted from flow, King Kunta notes, “I’ll be at a Google or whatever, like a big tech space, and it’s interesting ‘cause I’ll be

there working with people or speaking or just doing different things, and people that work there will look at me as a young, black, masculine person, and the look at me so intimidated.” KK articulates a firm understanding that, even in mundane work environments, his masculinity is read of one of intimidation, rooted in the legacies of viewing Black masculinity with utter disdain.

TJ, a 19 year old from Connecticut who, at the time of our interview, had yet to start hormonally transitioning, told me:

I feel like even if I want people to treat me one way, all they're gonna see if I am stealth or passing is like, a Black man. And to the world right now I just feel like a very negative image, but I would want people to see me as just like a very friendly, happy person who is very nonchalant, relaxed, and is very open minded, and approachable but I don't think that's how everyone would see me.

Here, TJ echoes King Kunta’s grasp on the viewing and treatment of black masculine bodies. TJ knows he will be probably be viewed as a black cisgender man, and that black masculinity comes with mistreatment, so it is understandable that he would be concerned with how others perceive him. Nuancing his thought, he continues, “A lot of my friends I think see me like that in like a very positive light. But generally in passing I don't think people would.” At 19 and pre-T, TJ knows that not all people will view his existence as a positive. Importantly, this is not rooted solely in gender. Even without the experience of passing for a cisgender black man, TJ’s experiences of blackness provide him knowledge that black masculinity is rarely treated with affection. He sums up this embodied knowledge, stating, “So it's like weird, because it's almost like a different type of dysphoria. People are gonna see me more scary now I feel like as a Black man than how I would want them to, which is sort of feminine I guess. Just like a nice person.” TJ unequivocally states that he anticipates experiencing the racialized dysphoria that other

interlocutors speak of — dysphoria that is not caused by him feeling an internal, individual misalignment with his body, but rather one ignited by white supremacist interpolations of his personhood.

Doing the Work

While this chapter thus far has discussed how interlocutors experience racialized dysphoria, they do still experience gendered dysphoria in the manner in which it is commonly articulated. Understanding how interlocutors experience gendered dysphoria further solidifies how particular systems coalesce to produce certain forms of dysphoria. Specifically, this section highlights how interlocutors move through instances of gendered dysphoria by conducting what I call ‘dysphoria work.’

Unsurprisingly, interlocutors describe gender dysphoria around their chests, voice, and periods. TJ tells me, “Yeah. I mainly have it a lot around my chest. That's the main part. Another part is my voice, wishing it was deeper, because usually that's what outs me to people. If they just see me, they assume I'm male, but once I start speaking, then they might correct themselves.” Secondary sex characteristics are what others utilize to surmise gender, and TJ notes he feels dysphoric about the tools (his voice) individuals use to try and deduce his gender. Duane sums this up, telling me, “For me, I don't know, most times when I feel dysphoric, it's more so like, I'm not seen for who I am. And it makes me feel like people can't really see me but they only see what they want to perceive me as.” The misreading of his body led Duane to start “paying attention more to different parts of my body and looking at myself and being very, very judgmental about everything.”

Collectively, we see that it is not necessarily about TJ disliking his voice or Duane being unhappy with himself that initiates dysphoria, but others' misinterpolation of them that produces particular modes of discomfort. In an effort to move through these moments of dysphoria, interlocutors conduct what I call dysphoria work. Merriam-Webster defines work as a verb meaning "to exert oneself physically or mentally especially in sustained effort for a purpose – to produce a desired effort or result." Similarly, I conceptualize dysphoria work as the activities involving mental, physical, or spiritual effort, done to achieve the result of surviving through moments of various forms of dysphoria.

For example, obtaining hormones — including the copious amounts of research involved — is a form of dysphoria work. Interlocutors do this to align their bodies with their own desires, but also to align them with the expectations of society. That's not to say that hormones and the changes that come with them do not bring trans people pleasure regardless of their interactions with others; however, the interlocutors I talked with note researching about and starting hormones as primarily an effort to change their secondary sex characteristics in order to be read by others in a certain way. Kai from Atlanta tells me, "my voice was one of the main things that used to give me dysphoria. So, I wanted it to drop." Kai further tells me that he packs every day for the purposes of being able to use a STP (Stand-to-Pee) device.

Within the masculine transgender community prosthetic penises are often known as 'packers'. Packing can be thought of as an umbrella term used to describe a range of actions concerned with wearing and carrying a prosthetic penis. Reasons that individuals pack vary, but for some the goal is to create an appearance or bulge that resembles that of

a cisgender man's. Others pack to give their body the ability to perform certain behaviors, such as urinating standing up or participating in certain sexual activities. Explaining his decision to pack, Kai tells me, "I got tired of like going across campus to find a gender neutral bathroom so umm, I just started packing so I could use the men's restroom." Kai does the dysphoria work of finding, purchasing, and learning how to wear and use the packer in order to feel comfortable executing the quotidian task of using a public bathroom. Kai and other trans people do this work because the treatment of trans people — especially black trans people within bathrooms — is confrontational at best.

For trans masculine individuals like TJ, Duane, and myself who do not use packers or STPs, the task of peeing requires a different performance of dysphoria work. For instance, while moving/driving cross country during the late summer of 2018 with a close friend, I rarely used the bathroom during stops. Instead, I would hold my urine for most of the day until we settled in a hotel for the night. My rationale for doing this was two-fold. First, as two black masculine people, we were aware of the dangers of stopping at secluded rest stops. However, for me, the added knowledge that I did not have access to gender neutral bathrooms induced moments of gender dysphoria. I was not dysphoric because seeing my body while using the bathroom upsets me personally, but because I know the presence of my body in the men's bathroom (designed with cismen in mind) causes a disruption from flow that others may respond to negatively. When every other man stands to pee, and I enter a stall, I am forced to reckon with the fact that I was not intended for the space. I can stop and yell "Here I am!," or I can undertake the work needed to survive. Depending on the context, my approach to this choice varies — and the context often is out of my control. It is the small aspects of the bathroom experience

— such as my urine hitting the toilet bowl at a different angle and speed thus producing a different noise than others — that alerts me and those around me that my body functions differently than theirs.

The feeling of presenting a disruption from flow in bathrooms is common, and TJ and I discussed it in great detail. So much so, that during a bathroom break from recording, I shared techniques to use while peeing without a packer. These techniques include: flushing the toilet when you urinate, so as not to let others hear. Additionally, I taught him how to position his body on the seat in a manner that angles his urine up at the bowl in a way that produces a hissing noise that mimics that of cismen peeing. I want to reiterate that TJ, myself, and others do not do dysphoria work because we hate our genitals or have severe discomfort around our bodies. Conversely, no interlocutor expressed that they feel bottom dysphoria or a desire for bottom surgery. This work is conducted, and I pass the knowledge I have along to TJ, because others read black transness as a threat. This dysphoria work is a tangible strategy of survival. For many trans folks, surviving the bathroom space is just as important at home as it is in public.

Alex provides tangible, quotidian ways he conducts dysphoria work in order to survive every day. “I usually take a shower every other day because I don't like taking showers because I have dysphoria when I'm naked. So I just take a shower every day, so depending on what day it is, I'll take a shower. So on days I take a shower I get up at seven, so I have extra time to do that,” he explains to me. Showering every day is an activity that many take for granted, requiring little psychological effort; however, Alex explains: “I will fog up, I will turn on the heat on the shower really high until like the mirror fogs up so that way if I walk past it naked I won't see my tits.” While Alex is not

discussing direct interactions with other people, he is very much conducting dysphoria work of the emotional and physical nature in order to survive his day as a racialized trans subject.

Acquiring hormones, altering public bathroom practices, and particular modes of showering are all exemplars of dysphoria work, conducted by interlocutors in order to make it to the other side of moments of dysphoria. I continue this discussion in chapter 2, where I note how interlocutors utilize their experiences of black girlhood to inform their performance of dysphoria work. Furthermore, chapter three highlights the exact style that interlocutors use to exploit the features and affordances of Tumblr, in part to help them further survive and thrive.

A Concluding Thought

This chapter sets up the manner in which dysphoria manifests outside of gendered experiences. Specifically, it notes that dysphoria is not inherently or solely a feeling, but instead a collection of moments, both internal and external, to move through. This reconceptualization acknowledges the materiality of dysphoria while also recognizing the agency enacted by interlocutors that allows them to survive. In the moments in which interlocutors are disrupted from flow and experience racialized dysphoria, we witness the manner in which dysphoria oozes, then is soaked up to be oozed back. We can see how, on a quotidian level, dysphoria is always present, and yet not.

Duane tells me, “I don't think it will ever really go away.” He is correct. Under white supremacy and cissexism, dysphoria is never to go away, whether it be dysphoria in the sense of bodily discomfort or dysphoria in the sense of disruption from flow. The mechanisms of systematic oppression make it so that, unless you are fucking with

yourself hardcore, then you probably are dealing with some dysphoria. Luckily, even if one is not in a perpetual state of self-love, there are strategies to move through racialized and gendered dysphoria. The dysphoria work discussed here demands that we question the importance of knowing these tangible strategies, and how they are beneficial to trans bodies and non-trans bodies alike. When we explore these questions, we remember that the stability of both whiteness and cissexism are elaborate figments of our collective imaginations.

CHAPTER 3

“I UNDERSTAND THE STRUGGLE OF BEING A WOMAN”: BLACK TRANSMEN, MISOGYNOIR, AND ABJECT LEGIBILITY

Atlanta, Georgia 11:00 am February 4, 2018

It is a clear winter day, and I am in Atlanta for a weekend trip to visit Kai. On Sunday morning, he makes me eggs, toast, and local tea from the farmer’s market before we nestle in his room and start to talk. Near the end of our conversation, after we have been interrupted several times by his siblings, he tells me, “like if anything growing up being raised as a woman has only taught me to think about other people when you’re making decisions for yourself.” The first interruption comes from Kai’s twin sister, who loudly bangs on the door while we discuss his experiences with mental illness.

“I do go see a therapist –” Kai starts to tell me.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

“What do you need!?” he yells towards the door.

KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!

“I’m busy!” he yells back.

She continues knocking on his basement bedroom door several times before storming up the stairs and slamming the door. No more than twenty minutes later, Kai’s older brother knocks on the door as well. Kai remains silent and I follow his lead. Unspoken, we both pray that if we remain silent he will go away. We are wrong. He keeps knocking and knocking and knocking. We both sit on his bed staring at each other, trying to wait it out. Tension builds as we sit in silence.

Knock! Knock! Knock! The force of his knock indicates that he’s upset.

“Just open the door!” he yells.

“It’s cool,” I say as I get up to open the door. His brother makes his request known; Kai obliges; we go back to our conversation. Afterward, Kai explains, “If I’m doing something everyone expects me to drop everything and to just help. But it’s because it’s like –” Kai is not able to finish his sentence. His sister’s room is directly above us, and she has turned her music all the way up; the bass drowns out our conversation and my ability to immediately interrogate the interaction.

Instead, it is during the plane ride home, while listening to the recording of our conversation, that I finally start to review our interactions with his siblings. When I answered the door for his brother and not his sister, I chalked it up to an effort to continue with the interview. But his brother’s persistent knocking made me answer the door. I have never been a fan of conflict, and I previously assumed this was an inborn personality trait. However, Kai’s statement that “being raised as a woman has only taught me to think about other people when you’re making decisions for yourself” caused me to rethink this. When I asked Kai why he so often gave into the requests of those around him, he pointedly answered, “I’ve been raised that way and feel like it’s an obligation sometimes, and it stresses me out.” 30,000 feet in the air, I realized I felt the same way. It did not matter that we were busy and conducting an interview, I answered the door for his brother because I believed it would minimize the risk of conflict. I had been taught as a child to give others, especially boys/men, what they wanted when I felt threatened, so that whatever violence was directed my way would end more quickly. Months of talking with interlocutors regarding their childhood(s) and its impact on their current lives led me to ask: What is the impact of black girlhood on interlocutors? What is the impact of black

girlhood on interlocutors' relationships with family, friends, and their communities? How does the embodied knowledge of black girlhood materialize in interlocutors' lives after identifying as trans-masculine? Finally, how does black girlhood impact how interlocutors conceptualize their subjectivities now?

In this chapter, I explore the social and cultural significance of black girlhood in the lives of black transmasculine individuals. I focus on the socialization interlocutors experience when perceived as young black girls, and their experiences of queer sexuality during childhood. Based on interlocutors' experiences, this chapter examines how misogynoir impacts black transmasculine individuals. I conclude the chapter with discussions of the uncertainty and confusion interlocutors have regarding their present-day embodiments as trans-masculine people as a result of misogynoir, as well as how this experience leaves interlocutors in a state of abject legibility. We can understand the abject legibility interlocutors face as further proof of the specific, yet diverse ways, that the dysphoria discussed in the previous chapter materializes.

Why Black Girlhood?

I examine black girlhood in this chapter primarily because it is germane to the story of my interlocutors. I believe it is important to examine the various ways that black girlhood is constructed, given that researchers often "miss the cultural codes" that inform black girls' lives (hooks 1996 xiii). Thus, we must recognize that black girls are "worthy of our intellectual, artistic, and political labor...they could, if we listened, change the world" (Owens 2017 117). Work concerning black girls should "be a political relationship of being in community with and for Black girls" (Owens 2017 118). Even though my interlocutors are not currently black girls, the growing field of black girl

studies could be productively expanded by acknowledging that not all black girls grow up to be black women. This understanding not only illuminates the realities of black trans-masculine individuals, but it also contributes to the need for work that presents the realities of black girlhood “in all its variations and diversity” (hooks 1996 xiii) and contributes to “the infinite and ever conflicting representations of Blackgirls” (Hill 2016 263).² Exploring black trans-masculine individuals’ youth conflicts with stereotypical understandings of black girlhood, thus producing new understandings.

Some in this study recognized their transgender identity during their formative years, while others identified as girls during childhood. Importantly, all participants said that, regardless of how they felt about their gender, those around them interpolated, treated, and expected them to behave emotionally, physically, culturally, and socially as black girls. Thus, black trans-masculinity is impacted by misogynoir, which forecloses and limits socio-political and cultural understandings of the possibilities of black girlhood. Black trans-masculinity is one of many erased possibilities of black girlhood. This erasure not only leads to society’s failure to consider the material needs of black transmasculine populations, it also helps create a psychological impediment where interlocutors are left struggling to create gender expressions outside of dominant conceptualizations. Moreover, black transmasculine individuals who cannot or choose not to medically transition are also impacted by misogynoir as their bodies continue to be interpolated as black women.

² Hill combines ‘Black’ and ‘Girl’ as a political act to not compartmentalize the experiences of black girls.

While some transgender scholars argue that trans-masculine individuals do not experience transmisogyny, I disagree, though I acknowledge that my disagreement takes shape in a murky intellectual and sociopolitical context. I do not take lightly the potential political and inter/intra-communal ramifications of an argument such as this. Black trans-masculine people experience misogynoir in distinct ways, and acknowledging that does not and should not detract from understanding how black girls/women/femmes experience misogynoir. While misogynoir is not perpetuated exclusively by black people, I treat this chapter as an intra-communal conversation between black women and black trans-masculine people in order to better interrogate the overlaps and divergences in our experiences of misogynoir. Ultimately, I hope my approach to this chapter highlights both this project's commitment to black girls/women/femmes and the larger theoretical and political importance of highlighting their experiences.

Misogynoir: A Theoretical Base

The following section discusses the cultural and intellectual formations of misogynoir, and the importance of utilizing it to discuss the lives of black trans-masculine individuals. A large portion of the literature surrounding misogynoir is not conducted in traditional academic settings. Queer feminist scholar Moya Bailey and Trudy of the *Gradient Lair*, a feminist blog, use online spaces to conceptualize misogynoir and how it is perpetuated by dominant power structures. Bailey describes misogynoir as the process of “noting both an historical anti-Black misogyny and a problematic intraracial gender dynamic that [has] wider implications in popular culture” (Bailey and Trudy 2018 762). Black men experience anti-black racism and women experience misogyny; misogynoir highlights how these dynamics intersect in black

women's experiences and histories, particularly in visual media representations. Black women experience anti-black racism and misogyny simultaneously.

Trudy of the *Gradient Liar* is, like Bailey, an instrumental force behind current understandings of misogynoir. Ironically, Trudy, a black woman, is almost never cited when discussing misogynoir. The erasure of Trudy's intellectual contributions itself is a prime example of misogynoir in action (Bailey and Trudy 2018, 756). Trudy's theorizations are extremely important because they expand Bailey's articulation of misogynoir beyond media representation:

because pop culture does not exist in a vacuum and actually creates/reflects culture, as a Black woman who experiences stereotypes, violence, oppression and dehumanization unique to Black women's bodies, experiences, lives and histories, it is my evaluation that the term and what Moya wrote about it clearly expands beyond pop culture itself. (2014)

Trudy's articulation demands a recognition of the dialectical and, at times, mutually constitutive relationship between anti-black misogyny and popular culture. Larger socio-political factors shape visual and popular culture, which means that scholars should engage with the ways that media contributes to the material, socio-political conditions of black womanhood (Trudy 2014). Because other theories do not allow nuanced examinations of misogyny and girlhood, in this chapter, I specifically utilize Bailey's and Trudy's theorizations surrounding the dehumanization of black women to help shed light on interlocutors' experiences of being perceived as black girls.

Julia Kristeva's seminal piece *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982) discusses abjection as the moments in which we are made aware of our own impending deaths, and the state of vulnerability that accompanies this. She presents this realization via processes of bodily inversion, or bringing the inside out. When you think about seeing

someone's intestines on the outside of their body, it causes you to realize that you too have intestines that also can be on the outside of your body. It becomes a visceral reminder of the vulnerability of our own existence. Kristeva's articulation of bodily/material abjection can be productively translated to understand the dynamics of societal abjection. For example, think about a time you realized you did not fit into a social space. This feeling you get when you recognize yourself as an outsider on the inside can help us understand the basics of abjection.

However, for marginalized subjects, the process of abjection goes beyond being cast out. As Kristeva tells us, it is a process that "does not respect borders, positions, rules, the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). Through these ambiguities, abjection disrupts our expectations of the fixity of categories, including "identity, system, and order" — creating an uncertainty that can be horrifying for some. The abject goes "toward the place where meaning collapses" (2). Black trans-masculinity is abject because it muddles the supposedly clear lines of what race, gender, and sexuality mean. The ambiguous nature of interlocutors' blackness and transness leaves those around them feeling uncertain and uncomfortable. Before transitioning, interlocutors experience abject violence as black girls via social interactions, the policing of their bodies, and the sexualization they face. This abjection is a result of being 'legible' as a black girl. Following transition they are legible as black men and not necessarily marked as transgender. However, even after altering their gender expression to present as more masculine, they are still visibly marked by their blackness and read as black cisgender men. This leaves them feeling like they are not seen holistically as themselves. As noted

in the previous chapter, these particular disruptions from flow occur due to historical residues of white supremacy, resulting in racialized forms of dysphoria for interlocutors.

What happens when a person is made legible on one hand – in this case, as a masculine subject — but still experiences abjection regarding their race and its relationship to their gender? To help untangle this, I deploy the concept of Hyper Invisibility. I conceptualize Hyper Invisibility as the places where the socio-historical context of black masculinity and Bailey and Trudy's theorizations of misogynoir meet. It thus provides a way to conceptualize and codify the experiences of black transmen, both before and after socially or medically transitioning. It is a language tool to try to articulate the complex nature of black transmasculine existence. Firstly, the term allows for a discussion of the ways blackness is marked as excess and something to be reduced by society. Secondly, the term represents the societal invisibility my interlocutors experienced while being read as black women/girls before transitioning. Thirdly, Hyper Invisibility codifies the non-visibility black transmen experience due to their lack of inclusion in academic or mainstream representations and conversations of trans people. Throughout our conversations, interlocutors explained how they understand their socialization as children leading to them experiencing Hyper Invisibility in adulthood. Interlocutors had similar childhood experiences with their friends, families, and church communities, as well as similar treatment from individuals following transition. For the sake of clarity, the following sections utilize interlocutors' common experiences as a plinth to present major themes. The presentation of these themes solidifies exactly how misogynoir and black trans-masculinity are intertwined, leading to a state of Hyper Invisibility.

Tales of Black Girlhood: Church Life, Colorism, and Sexualization

Toledo, Ohio 12:00 pm October 20, 2017

I step out of my Air BnB and the wind immediately slaps me across the face. I am wearing an Arizona State University hoodie and my favorite yellow knitted hat, but they are no match for the crisp October weather. The University of Toledo is only two blocks away. I pull my hat over my ears and pray the walk does not take too long. I cross Bancroft Street and head east. As I hoped, it does not take me long to reach UT. Toledo sits on the northern border of Ohio, about an hour's drive south of Detroit. While Duane grew up surrounded by Toledo's 27% black population, he currently resides near campus.

The campus has neatly trimmed trees and freshly cut grass. The buildings are old and remind me of castles. I snap photos of manicured flower beds, so I don't forget what they look like. I feel like a kid discovering grass for the first time. Living in Phoenix for nearly four years makes me appreciate the scenery more than I typically would. The campus is small, and it doesn't take long for me to find who I am looking for. Standing in front of University Hall, Duane waits for me. Duane is a junior studying history at UT. He is a few inches taller than me, with peaceful brown eyes and a round face with chubby cheeks. He's goofy, constantly smiling, and has a habit of chuckling at most things people say. He's wearing a tan baseball cap and a jacket to hold off the breeze.

"Wanna tour of the campus, since we here?" he asks.

I quickly agree. The nerd in me loves being on campuses, but I also want to see where he goes to school, what his daily environment is like. He takes me in and out of buildings, past statues and more perfectly manicured lawns. We end on the same side of campus where we started, cross Bancroft Street again, and head towards his friend's

nearby apartment. There's a keypad on the door where a key slot would normally be. It takes him a few tries, but eventually he gets the code right and we head inside. The apartment has tan walls and a walk-through kitchen that leads to both the front door and the dining room. A couch is placed against the north wall of the living room; on the opposite side, a *Pulp Fiction* poster hangs. A small TV on a dark brown stand completes the décor of the space. I meet his friend, a genderqueer student from Lebanon, and we all chat for close to an hour. Eventually, Duane gently ushers his friend away so we can start our interview. We shift to the dining room table and begin a conversation that will last for the rest of the day.

"Tell me about your childhood," I start.

"I had a pretty good childhood, I guess, in many ways. I was a fairly privileged child, so there's not too much I can look back on my childhood and really complain about materialistically."

"How was it privileged?" I ask.

"My mom, she's the director down at the Board of Elections for Lucas County. She's in political [life] fairly heavily now...my dad is a police officer, he's been a police officer for years." Duane continues to describe his upbringing in a stable middle-class black family from Toledo, spending time at family functions, playing with cousins, and attending church.

His eyes light up as he discusses his relationship to church as a child. Similar to a lot of black American children, Duane "grew up in church right out the womb." With joy, he tells me, "When I was younger I loved going to church...I loved all of that. It was how I grew up." Duane's love for the church led him to wanting to be a minister at one point.

Duane is not unique in describing church as a significant part of his upbringing; all interlocutors discuss their interactions with church. Alex from Phoenix notes, “I attended church usually three times a week on minimum. Sometimes four, depending on whether or not my dad would drag me to his [event] “Praise Our Soul” cause he was the sound guy for church.” King Kunta (KK) from Oakland tells me, “Even as a kid, with my grandparents, they were very much into church. My papa is a missionary, so he travels around the world building churches and schools.” KK does not “identify as Christian” now, he says, “but I definitely like carry that with me.” For interlocutors, the church had a significant impact on their understanding of gender and race as children, as well as their current conceptualization of self.

For some black people, there is a difference between *attending* church and being *raised* in church. Being *raised* means that everything you learn about life first filters through the lens of church. Problematically, “notions of race and gender are reinforced through [church] worship performance practices” (Casselberry 2008, 155). Patriarchy and misogynoir rooted in spiritual doctrine lead to a church atmosphere where men are privileged and women are “required to submit and be obedient to God, male church authority, and their husbands” (Casselberry 2013, 72). Expectations of submission extend to what women can and cannot wear inside and outside of church settings, who they may associate with, and the types of labor they conduct. In many black churches, women do the cooking, serve men/boys their food first, provide informal spiritual guidance to other women, and organize church programming. Though women perform exorbitant amounts of labor, they hold no formal power (Casselberry 2017, 82). The mistreatment of women comes in an effort by the Black church to not be further ‘othered’

by dominant society. Consequently, black churches end up participating in respectability politics that mimic problematic behavior rooted in white supremacy. Specifically, the mistreatment of women and those who identify as queer and non-binary hurts the individuals most vital in maintaining – literally and figuratively – the infrastructure of the church (see Johnson 2008, Casselberry 2008, Crawley 2016).

Expectations of women are transferred to black girls. Black girls sing in the choir, serve as junior ushers, and help older women with church tasks. As Fleda Mask-Jackson highlights, “being a choir member, an usher, or giving a speech for a special program [gives] the children an opportunity to imitate the behaviors of adults” in church settings (1991, 92). Parents are expected to guide their children “in the way they should go,”³ which includes not only rearing children in the home, but also bringing them to church regularly so that the church may also aid in raising the child. From young ages, children are conditioned to not stray beyond the expectations laid out by the church, and to join the church fully when they come of age (Mask-Jackson 1991, 91-92).

Because church was such an integral aspect of interlocutors’ childhoods, the line between church life and regular life was not only blurred, it simply did not exist. Alex notes, “growing up in church, there're so many gender specific things that I had to do and that we're separated into. Girls do this, boys do that...it's hard to talk about anything that happened before the age of 18 unless you talk about it like that.” Alex’s statements highlight just how much black church culture permeates black children’s lives, as well as their understandings of themselves and the world. Zaire supports Alex’s claims and tells

³ “In the way they should go” is a term used in the Black community to remind parents they should bring their children up in the church. See Proverbs 22:6

me, “I have a certain way of carrying myself that has def been trained into me through church.” In this way, the black church is more of a mindset or embodiment than a place of attendance.

For many, being black is equated with performing the behaviors learned in black church. Furthermore, for many, the black community and the black church are conflated into one entity. This means negative encounters that occur within the church can be normalized as black intra-communal problems not to be discussed publicly. For the interlocutors of this story, black girlhood and the abjection experienced in black churches/communities consisted of body policing rooted in colorism, sexism, heteronormativity, and transphobia. In this way, the violence directed at black girls/women/femmes was normalized, leaving a lasting impact on interlocutors. There are positive aspects of black church, and I am not claiming church or black people are solely responsible for the violence experienced by interlocutors. However, one cannot discuss the black American experience without discussing the black church.

Toledo, Ohio 6:00 pm October 20, 2017

We have been talking for a while, long enough for the sun to go down and for us to force ourselves to stop and eat dinner. After burgers and fries from UT’s dining hall, Duane starts to let me into the more sensitive aspects of his childhood, the particular forms of violence he experienced. All my interlocutors noted body policing because of their race and perceived gender. However, for some interlocutors, including Duane and Zaire, colorism also had a significant impact on their childhood experiences of misogynoir. As institutions such as the media privilege lighter skinned women, darker skinned women are denigrated. This specific intersection of racism and misogyny shapes

the lived experiences of dark skinned women and girls. Speaking in a sober tone, Duane tells me of his experiences:

When I started coming out when I first admitted to myself that I was trans, was when I was 20 years old. So I can't really say, I can't claim the identity of black womanhood. But growing up as a black girl, yes, black women are some of the – especially black girls – black women are some of the most sexualized people on this earth, and it's ridiculous. You have to deal with that at such a young age.

He lets out a sigh and a small chuckle to defuse the heaviness of his previous statements before continuing:

I was a dark skinned black little girl, so I was in growing up with that colorism aspect of, you're so dark this and that, and I didn't have what was considered good hair. I have very kinky hair – growing up in that aspect, I always felt I was what was, I felt like what was considered an ugly little girl. Even though I wasn't, but that's how I was socialized and that's how I grew up in my community though.

Following a final pause, Duane concludes his thoughts:

Because I was darker skinned, I was taller, I was always more heavy set. So I was not what people considered to be pretty because I wasn't light skinned, I didn't have pretty long hair. That was never how I loved my life. Growing up young in your family, people be like, you're so pretty [pause] but I'm like, but actually growing up in the community was completely different thing.

The community Duane is speaking of is the larger black community of Toledo, which includes his church. Duane articulates that even though his immediate family told him one thing, the divergent messages he received from the community intercepted these compliments, leaving him feeling unpretty.

Furthermore, Duane's reflection evokes a long standing struggle regarding hair within the black community. Race plays a considerable role in determining what is considered "good hair" and "bad hair." Hair that is long and straight and closer to Euro-centric standards of beauty is considered "good hair." Conversely, "bad hair" has a texture that consists of tightly coiled curls. In addition to skin color, hair texture has been

and continues to be one of the most condemned physical attributes of black people, especially black women.

The practice of hair shaming originated during the colonization of Africa and continued during American slavery, as individuals with “good hair” were treated better. The mentality surrounding black hair continued during reconstruction and Jim Crow, and played a significant role in black communities’ assimilation into mainstream society. Specifically, women and some men used chemical treatments to straighten their hair in an effort to economically survive.

During the 1960’s Black Power movement, notions around black hair started to change; however, this movement lost steam as economic institutions incentivized having “good hair” by deeming styles such as afros and braids unprofessional. Subsequently, many blacks returned to straightening their hair in hopes of economic success (Gardner, Hughey and Kaori 2014, 485). Recently, the Natural Hair Movement has inspired a resurgence of positive articulations of kinky hair; however, as Duane’s experiences show the historical legacy surrounding black hair continues to make it one of the most complex aspects of black aesthetics.

While black men also experience anti-blackness and hair shaming, Duane’s childhood is in part a result of the multi-layered attributes of misogynoir. First, he has to deal with committing the “ultimate sin” of being born with genitalia commonly associated with girls/women (Trudy 2014, Manne 2016, Manne 2018). Second, he must contend with society’s anti-blackness, in the form of colorism and hair shaming. Finally, Duane notes his weight playing a role in the way people treated him, which is a result of rampant fatphobia in society. As my conversation with Zaire reveals, Duane’s

experiences are, unfortunately, not unusual, as misogynoir pervades experiences of black girlhood across the U.S.

Syracuse, New York 4:00 pm September 8, 2018

I am visiting Zaire for the fifth time since January 2018. It is the first sunny day after ten straight days of rain. Naturally, we jump at the chance to hang out. Zaire is around 5'8", has dark skin and carries an authenticity with him. I recently moved to Ithaca, which is approximately an hour from Syracuse, and Zaire has been a steady member of my upstate New York welcome committee. We have grown particularly close, texting almost every day. Over the course of our friendship, Zaire has shared much of his life, including his struggle to survive emotionally, physically, and financially in Syracuse. Syracuse is currently listed as one of the most violent cities in the state of New York (Faubel 2018), and on numerous occasions while driving around the city's south side, Zaire and I have had to change our route to avoid a taped off crime scene. The south side is primarily black, and Zaire explains to me that growing up in this part of town greatly impacted his childhood, his mental health, and how he understands himself. During our initial interview in February of 2017, I asked him, "if you were kind of summing it, how would you describe your childhood?" His reply was as candid as he always is:

It was very depressing. I was very depressed most of my life until college. I became a happier person. A more positive person. And it's not because of college that I became happier and more positive but it's because my need to change to survive. Cause I tried hanging myself multiple times growing up. I didn't want to live. Nobody really made me want to live. And when, uh, people in my family would hear about stuff like this, that I was doing cutting and all that and popping pills and whatever, they would just kind of throw the bible at me. My mom would say: stop doing that white kid shit. Cause apparently depression is for white kids. Even though my mother was mentally ill, which made no sense. It's like, if you have a mental illness, what makes you think that I wouldn't have one from dealing with you for so many years, undiagnosed?

The practice of black parents dismissing mental illness is steeped in respectability politics. Families do not want to bring attention or shame to their family so as not to give white (or black) people a reason to gossip about them. This fear of shame is rooted in larger, external white supremacist structures. The consequences for black families is not just social ostracizing, but often involves material losses such as employment, housing, and educational opportunities. Furthermore, the dismissal of mental illness as something white people do is often codified as a way to prepare black youth for the racist landscape they will encounter as adults. Regardless of the reasons, the treatment of mentally ill black children leaves a permanent impact. In an attempt to reciprocate Zaire's vulnerability, I tell him: "Yeah, I had, uh," I hesitate before continuing, "My freshman year, I had my first suicide attempt. And literally my sister was like: You know better. She literally said that."

"Yeah, they really say shit like that," Zaire responds.

"You're so right and that's the realest shit I ever heard," I respond.

As Zaire continues telling me about his childhood, he says, "It's not even like it just happen that one time. I tried multiple times."

"Do you think – if you were trying to place that, would you say it's depression? Mental illness? All of it combined?" I ask. Zaire replies:

I would say it was everything. It was being poor. It was being depressed and ostracized; it was being queer and not even knowing what the fuck queer was. You know what I mean? But not wanting to say I was. It was being made fun of by people for my skin. It was hating black people, because they were some of the rudest people to me at the time, cause that's all that I was surrounded by. It didn't occur to me that, oh if I'm surrounded by, particularly by this demographic and all these people are poor and hungry they're all gonna be assholes. That makes sense.

I didn't think like that back then. I thought, yo! You a fucking asshole and I wanna fight you. I mean use to just get angry.

"Did you get in lot of fights as a kid?" I ask. Zaire's answer provides a deeper understanding of his childhood and his treatment as a black girl: "Kind of. And kind of not. I got away with a lot of things because a long time in my life I didn't speak. I was quiet because my mom use to tell me a child should be seen and not heard. My family use to say that a lot. A child should be seen and not heard"

"That's definitely on some black ass shit." I interject.

Zaire replies, "Yeah, it is. My mom used to tell me to shut up all the time, to the point that one day she told me to shut up so much that one of my grandmas was like: Nikki, why you always telling that child to shut up? You never let her speak." The treatment Zaire received from his mother is a part of a legacy of black women and girls being silenced literally and figuratively. This is especially the case for girls who are of darker skin tones. The silencing of black girls is one way of trying to make black girls invisible in society.

Duane and Zaire both experienced colorism, which resulted in two distinct outcomes. Duane's experiences were enacted by the larger black community he lived in, with his immediate family trying to counteract it. His experiences resulted in him having internal feelings of being unpretty. Conversely, Zaire's colorism was accompanied by difficulties of mental illness, queerphobia, poverty, and emotional abuse. These experiences left him to deal with both internal struggles such as depression, as well as outward feelings of hatred towards the black community he belonged/belongs to.

Interestingly, despite the treatment they received from their churches and communities, neither Duane nor Zaire says they hold animosity towards them currently. Like Duane, church was a very influential part of Zaire's childhood. Even though he was not "allowed to be out" in church, and the Bible was used as a tool to dismiss his pain, he still at times desires to be in church. Zaire explains:

I took certain things from church, like the ability to motivate myself by telling myself to believe something. You know, the church is good at teaching you to believe in something blindly. So it's like, what happens when I direct that same faith and apply it to myself. Well, you become unbeatable. You can become anything you want. You gain the power to manifest, to materialize your dreams. Nothing is holding you back at that point. You know, when I just said it, I felt it inside me.

I understand what he means, and I feel the affective shift of the space. He concludes his thoughts by telling me, "Church gave me that. So I can't resent my upbringing." Zaire simultaneously acknowledges the anger he felt regarding his upbringing and his gratitude about its positive impact. Likewise, Duane tells me that in spite of the way he was treated, he still identifies as a Christian and has even considered going to seminary to become a preacher. Duane and Zaire are not alone. For a lot of queer black people, the church serves as a place of violence but also as a space where you learn to survive — a place of comfort and familiarity (Johnson 2008).

Toledo, Ohio 10:45 pm October 20, 2017

I am walking along Bancroft Street for the third time today. The lack of sun and the egregious assault of the wind cause me to shiver and shake. With the chattering of my teeth as background music, I replay my conversation with Duane in my head. Over and over again, I hear him say "black women are some of the most sexualized....You have to deal with that at such a young age." Duane's comments cause me to think about aspects

of black girls' experiences that I try hard to push away. However, I would be doing a disservice to Duane's and Zaire's experiences if I did not discuss the sexualization they experienced as a result of their dark skin. All women, regardless of race, experience sexualization, but the treatment of dark skin femme individuals is exacerbated. Duane tells me,

When you're of darker skin tone and you may have the slightly lower self-esteem is when you are heavily preyed on too. That was something that I had to deal with growing up as a little girl and that was a whole other thing.

Duane does not go into further detail, and I do not ask him to. Naively, when I started this project, I did not expect such serious topics to arise during the interview process.

Subsequently, I did not anticipate the emotional toll interviewing would have on me. His comments triggered a reminder of my own experiences with sexual abuse as a child, and unlike Duane, I did not have the courage to discuss it with someone I was meeting in-person for the first time.

All interlocutors participating in this project noted experiences of sexualization and/or sexual abuse as children. As in my interaction with Duane, I did not push interlocutors to discuss these experiences in detail. Honestly, I did not need to. Even without the details, I know their story. All women or individuals who are interpolated as women know their story. There is not a woman on earth who has not been sexualized at some point in their life. To argue otherwise would be to participate in the continued denial of the insidious nature of patriarchy, sexism, and misogynoir.

Misogynoir specifically makes sure that every black woman or girl experiences some form of sexualization. It might be as "small" as public staring and catcalling or as "big" as rape. Even black women who present as butch or genderqueer are subjected to

harassment regarding why they need to sleep with a man. According to the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence, “For every African-American woman who reports her rape, at least fifteen African-American women do not report theirs” (2018). They also note, “Approximately 40% of black women report coercive sexual contact by age eighteen” (2018). The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault puts this percentage higher at 60%, explaining that “African American girls and women 12 years old and older experienced higher rates of rape and sexual assault than white, Asian, and Latina girls and women from 2005-2010.”⁴ Moreover, individuals perceive black women as less believable and more responsible for their assaults than white women (Donovan 2007).

Regardless of the varying ways that women and girls are interpolated, their bodies are invariably viewed as consumable and disposable by men. The experiences of sexualization and sexual assault stay with survivors, and the participants of this study are no different. Interlocutors’ experiences of sexual assault showcase exactly how abject legibility and Hyper Invisibility operates. The sexual violence my interlocutors experience as black girls is abject because it draws attention to the “fragility of laws” and the fragility of our conceptualizations of how we think girls are treated in our society (Kristeva 1982). When participants become legible as black masculine people, the sexual assault they experienced is a major aspect of their identity that is often marked invisible by others. While significant, sexual violence is just one aspect of childhood that impacts participants. Feeling masculine — or, in the case of some interlocutors, feeling transgender — as children also shaped their pre- and post- transition lives.

⁴ <https://mcasa.org/assets/files/African-American-Women-and-Sexual-Assault1.pdf>

Storrs, Connecticut 7:00 pm 28 September 2018

I am at the University of Connecticut with TJ and we are discussing his family's acceptance of his gender and masculinity. While they are accepting of his masculinity and trans identity now, this was not always the case. Specifically, TJ explains that as a child, he identified as a tomboy and this caused moments of gender policing:

Yeah. I've always been a tomboy, or was a tomboy, wearing men's clothes. When I was younger, middle school age, my mom used to try to get me to wear more girly things, but I was always hesitant, like no. I've always just been like this, and she's [now] fine with that.

Identifying as a tomboy or masculine girl was a common theme among all interlocutors.

King Kunta tells me, "Yeah. Like I even had like, as a kid, my own kind of sense of like masculinity and like I was definitely a tomboy. That was like the word that like ...

Tomboy or whatever." And Duane explains:

I probably dressed fairly traditionally masculine. I was a tomboy when I was a kid. I never really liked dressing, what you would perceive as feminine. When I was younger, my mom, I had this basketball short and jersey combination. It was orange, first of all; it was the most ugly color I could possibly wear. It wasn't girl's clothing, so it was my first thing from the boy's section in the store and it was one of my favorite outfits. I used to wear that shit all the fucking time.

"How old were you?" I inquire. Duane replies:

When I had those, I want to say I was about eight years old. I wore them until I was about ten, and then it was too tight. I couldn't do it anymore. When I got them, they were fairly baggy, but that was one of my favorite outfits. I loved that, because it was my first, "Oh I'm dressing more comfortably.

In conversation with Duane, Kai agrees:

Yeah, they had me in dresses too. I used to, first of all, my grandmother when we went to go to *The Lion King* at The Fox last Sunday, I mean Sunday before last. And we were at dinner, and she was like, "You know, I was thinking and your transition is not that surprising to me. I had my whole life to prepare for it."

TJ, King Kunta, Duane, and Kai's recollection of their tomboy years falls into what Carr (2005) identifies as the two primary expressions of tomboyism: "choosing masculinity" and "the rejection of femininity" (121). Choosing masculinity means embracing, practicing, and valuing masculinity. Rejecting femininity involves devaluing feminine dress, feminine activities, and for some declining feminine identification (Carr 2005, 135). For these interlocutors, a major part of their "choosing of masculinity" and their "rejection of femininity" involved how they dressed. For instance, Duane's outfit not only helped to alter his presentation, but it also aided him in feeling more comfortable in his body by helping him feel more masculine. Interlocutors trying to wear clothing of their choosing can be understood as an effort to harness agency as children. This labor was performed in an attempt to change their overall presentation, and as a means to contravene having their bodies being read as feminine. Examining the embrace of masculinity/the rejection of femininity performed by interlocutors serves as a gateway to discussing and understanding the experiences of participants who felt transgender as a child.

Tempe, Arizona 1:00pm June 13 2018

"How about you suck a dick – TOUCHDOWN!" Alex screams as "Downtown" Antonio Brown makes a stellar catch and runs into the end zone. We are not in a football arena, but our energy level does not convey that. Instead, Alex and I are sitting on my couch trying to recover from the Phoenix sun. I met Alex online over five years ago, and he and his partner welcomed me to Phoenix when I first moved there to start my PhD. For years, our hangout routines always go the same way: Alex orders and/or cooks some form of food – today, it is Chipotle – and I rev up the Xbox to prepare for hours of

battling on Madden. It is our last time hanging out before I move to New York, and this meeting holds importance for more than one reason. First, it is a chance for me to redeem myself by picking a team that can actually beat the Steelers (I do not). And second, it is an opportunity to discuss in more detail many important aspects of his life.

“Here, mic yourself bro,” I instruct him between plays. He clasps the lavalier mic onto the collar of his blue and red hoodie right before yelling, “Oh and I caught that in bounds, so suck a dick!” I am used to Alex’s trash talking while playing Madden; in fact, it reminds me of gaming sessions back home with my brothers. I would not describe Alex as “a man’s man”; however, his verbal competitive outbursts often remind me of cismen that I know in my life. Alex is not afraid to speak his mind and take up space while doing so. While he encountered the similar policing as other interlocutors during childhood, Alex actively recognized himself as trans during childhood, and this impacts how he understands his own masculinity now. With both of our thumbs vigorously tapping away at our controllers, we discuss some of his childhood experiences around being a masculine girl.

Alex’s feelings surrounding feminine clothing match the sentiments of other interlocutors; however, the tone in which he conveys these feelings reflects a level of vitriol that is different from others. His attitudes regarding feminine expectations definitely fall within the category of “rejecting femininity.” “I’m still so bitter I wore a dress to prom, because my dad refused to pay for anything else,” he tells me. The majority of the anger Alex feels stems from the treatment he received from his father and step-mother. Following his parents’ separation, Alex’s father got remarried to a white woman and they moved into her house. Regarding this new home, life he tells me:

We like, lived in her house for months. I was just always...like, not girly enough and they gave me a lot of shit about it. And it'd always be like, "We're going to buy you girly clothes," and I'm like, "I'm not going to wear that shit, but good luck with that." Like, "We're going to teach you how to cook." I won't wanna do that. They're like, "Why are you such a tomboy?"

For Alex was not just a tomboy — he expresses knowing he was transgender as a child. I ask him, "You said that you just knew you weren't like the girl that you saw and that people would see. But what about being a girl made you know that you weren't her?"

Without moving his eyes away from the screen, he tells me:

I just never was down with any of it. As a kid, I used to walk around with my shirt off, because that was how I was comfortable, and that was just...I don't know, I was mad that I couldn't pee standing up. Just like little shit like that, I just knew like that's not... this isn't the life I'm supposed to be living. I don't know why I'm living this life, but it's definitely not how I'm supposed to be living my life right now.

He completes another play, securing a first down, and then continues:

I'm definitely a boy and I've always felt like a boy, and got in trouble for wanting boy things, and I remember my dad telling me specifically, "I'm not gonna pay for you to smell like a boy, so I'm not gonna buy any boy-smelling deodorant." And stuff like that. I got in trouble as a kid for throwing my dresses in the trash can, because I didn't wanna wear them, because they made my skin crawl. Like, I fucking hate dresses.

Alex presents a narrative of a child aware of their desire for bodily change, even if not fully aware of why they want the change. Furthermore, his family's reaction of not supporting his desires showcases how the abject nature of Alex's gender non-conformity was actively policed. Similarly, Zaire shared with me:

I was a very masculine girl. I came out the womb saying I wanted to be a boy. Like, literally one of my earliest memories is my mom freaking out on me. Cause I was standing in the mirror half naked undressed and I kept saying, "I wanna be a boy. I wanna be a boy. Why am I a girl?"

Alex and Zaire both expressed a resistance to femininity and the socialization they received. Moreover, they discuss their masculine girlhoods/being tomboys as an integral part of their transness during childhood. Conversely, for TJ, it was only after reaching early adulthood that he reflected on his childhood masculinity as a child. He feels this foreshadowed a trans identity:

I've noticed so many things that pointed out that I was trans...A couple things were, I would always pick boy characters in video games and cards games and whatever. There was this time where my grandmother, she was trying to get me to wear a dress or something like that. She was like, what, do you want to be a boy? I remember the feeling that I got when she asked that, like a pit in my stomach. I got really scared, and I said no, because I didn't want her to react badly or anything."

"How old do you think you were when that happened?" I ask. "I think nine, or seven, eight. Around that age," he replies. TJ's recollection reveals two important things. First, his fear of his grandmother's potential reaction show the collision of cissexism and misogynoir. Not only are black girls supposed to remain cisgender, but they are supposed to display their femininity in a particular way. Typically, tomboyism is considered a phase that does not cause parents to worry about their daughter's sexual orientation (Halberstam 1998, 5). However, interlocutors' experiences showcase that this is not the case for black girls, who are already under the pressures of sexual respectability politics placed on black bodies. Even as a child, TJ knew this, and therefore was scared and lied to his grandmother. Secondly, his experiences disrupt common narratives of trans individuals stating they always knew they were transgender at a young age.

This practice of childhood masculinity serving as retroactive proof of adult transness makes sense. When discussing the relationship between lesbianism and tomboyism, Craig and Lacroix (2011) explain that tomboy identities do not always

denote sexuality, but when they do, they are often associated with lesbians. Furthermore, for the women they worked with, connecting tomboyism with lesbianism allowed them “to create identity continuity from childhood through adulthood. By acknowledging they were tomboys, women can demonstrate that they did not “become” lesbian but rather always had tendencies [of lesbianism]” (455). I would extend this theorization to my interlocutors. They all used their past tomboy behavior to understand their current articulations of gender. It is only now that TJ reflects on his childhood experiences as signs pointing to his trans subjectivity. For Kai, similar moments helped his grandmother reflect on how Kai’s childhood masculinity influenced his eventual transition.

Additionally, for all participants, lesbianism served in a manner similar to childhood masculinity in allowing them to create a genealogy to their current arrival as transmasculine individuals. Many transmen report identifying as a lesbian prior to identifying as transmasculine. Five interlocutors previously identified as lesbian, with King Kunta identifying as queer. As a child King Kunta “definitely had like crushes on girls and shit.” Similarly, TJ was “attracted to girls at a very young age,” with his first crush being in kindergarten. Attraction to femme individuals is a lifetime constant for interlocutors. Regardless of feelings around their gender, every participant expressed certainty around their attraction to women.

However, as noted, interlocutors grew up in church settings, and this caused strife for many of them regarding their sexuality. For Duane, figuring out his sexuality caused him “so much inner turmoil.” Specifically, he tells me:

It was a part of me that I knew I wasn't straight. I didn't know what I was at the time, but I knew I wasn't straight and I knew I wasn't this little girl that everybody saw. My biggest thing, I would literally be in my closet crying, and I always ask

God, "Why did you make me this way? What did I do wrong? Is there something I am doing wrong? Why am I this way?" All this other stuff. It was very emotionally traumatizing for me, I guess.

Because of this turmoil, for Duane, sexuality "was something I was always scared to address or really think about." Alex similarly had to come to the realization that being non-straight does not make him "a worse or better Christian." Like many queer children, interlocutors had to figure out how they wanted to articulate their sexuality and what those definitions mean to them. Alex tells me he was a "super gold star lesbian" before starting hormones, and being a lesbian became an integral part of how interlocutors previously understood and currently understand their queerness. For example, it helped TJ discover he is trans. While Alex and Zaire voiced knowing they were trans as children, TJ tells me:

At a very young age, I was questioning my sexuality. I would look up on YouTube and watch videos about queer people, and lesbians in particular. There's femme lesbian and butch lesbian, obviously I identified more with the butch lesbian. I saw so many YouTube videos on that, and people giving advice on how to dress and how to talk, how to walk, how to approach girls in that lesbian specific community. To me, it didn't feel like enough. I *still* felt too feminine (emphasis mine based on inflection).

TJ's realization came in part because of puberty and his body changing. He says, "Thinking of myself as a butch lesbian, and then saying after that, I still don't feel masculine enough to express who I actually am on the outside, helped me realize that I was trans."

However, after identifying as transgender, interlocutors no longer fall within the qualifications of being a lesbian or woman, and subsequently are not welcomed in many femme/woman identified spaces. Zaire explains, "Sometimes they [women] don't wanna hang out with me cause they want girl time, and I'm not a girl, so I can't enjoy girl time

anymore.” I respond, “I wanna ask you about that. I was thinking about your question last night. You asked me about was there anything I wasn’t expecting and I didn’t realize how quickly I would get kicked out of women spaces and lesbian spaces -- ”. He jumps in, “Yeah! I was hurt by that. cause I’m not a lesbian anymore. I’m a dude. But I’m like yo, I lived your experience. Why can’t I?”

The transition out of lesbian spaces is hard for interlocutors, because many identified as a lesbian for the same amount of time or even longer than they have experienced being transgender, and they still feel a keen sense of community with women. TJ explains, “Now it kind of feels weird, because I feel like I’m not part of that anymore. I don’t want to be, but it was a big part of who I was before.” I ask him, “What does that feel like, not being in that space anymore, for you?” He replies, “I almost feel like I’m excluded, but not. I’m not supposed to be in that community anymore, but I felt like it was such a big part of my life earlier on.” And for TJ, it’s about more than just missing lesbian spaces; it’s about still feeling like a woman at times:

Yeah. I guess sometimes being in girl-only spaces, hearing gossip. Nothing appearance-wise, like makeup or dresses, but being with ... Something especially said, I think, a lot in lesbian communities, just feeling safe with women. I don't know, but understanding how ... Sometimes they say to women, "You need to pretend to be on the phone if you're walking to your car in a dark place." I know that. I've been in those types of situations, so I understand that a lot better.

His statements resonate with me. I ask:

Yeah, can we talk about that?...You said that whole, “know to be on a phone.” Can you tell me some of those other things that you just viscerally still...you feel like you’ll never... in my mind, I don't always remember that my body looks like this...and so, yeah, I’m wondering if you can talk more about some of those particular moments that you know or you feel are just embedded in you and you can’t let them go.

TJ replies:

Yeah. I've had moments where I've been outside during the night, and I see other men or whatever, and I get a little fearful. But then I just remember I look like a guy too, so they probably don't think of me as a woman, so that calms me down. But yeah, I definitely agree. Sometimes I forget that I look like a guy, so people are going to treat me like a guy.

TJ's statements are illuminating because they showcase the way that embodied knowledge of black womanhood is not discarded by interlocutors once they identify and present as trans-masculine. TJ's statements suggest that he could not remove the socialization he received in childhood, even if he desired to. Finally, his statements highlight the manner in which violence leaves a mark on the psyches of girls. As this chapter highlights, a commonality of being a woman and a girl "is that of living the ever present possibility that one will be gazed upon as a mere body" (Marion-Young 154). Moments such as TJ's forgetting that he looks like a guy and still, at times, mentally and physically performing as a woman solidifies the abject nature of black trans-masculinity, which causes interlocutors to feel invisible in many spaces. They are no longer allowed in women/femme identified communities, yet they are not cisgender men who were socialized to navigate masculine oriented spaces. Now that they pass as cisgender men, interlocutors feel as though they are grouped in with cisgender men.

Often, passing is conceptualized as the main goal of transgender people. While passing does carry some benefits, such as decreased risk of physical violence, it also comes with many downsides. For TJ, comments made by lesbians he knows bother him greatly:

Sometimes I feel like they make very general comments on men, saying, ugh, men. I don't know. They don't understand xyz, or just general insults. I just feel grouped into that now that I identify as trans.

“How does that make you feel? Do you ever feel erased in those moments?” I ask. He replies:

Sometimes in the comments about men, they’ll specifically say cis, straight men. In those situations, I guess I would feel like they kind of respect me, because they know that I went through womanhood in some way, so I understand the struggle of being a woman. When it’s general, I can see what you mean by erasure. I definitely think that I feel that on some level.

The erasure that TJ speaks of has implications for interlocutors. For instance, Alex tells me, “People are afraid of me now. I’m a threat to white women. I am that person they’re afraid of raping them in a dark alley. That fucking sucks.” Despite being perceived as wholly masculine by others, interlocutors cannot disregard their prior experiences of girlhood. Kai tells me:

I was raised as a little girl. Cause until I told my parents I was trans, that’s how they saw me. I see things differently. I see – I’m not – I feel like it’s a different mindset, because there’s an intersection in the way that I was raised. The journey I’ve taken to get where I am.

Zaire agrees:

We are a unique demographic regardless. You know what I mean, no matter what. You’re going to be that unique demographic, because we weren’t born that way. So it’s like, no I had the experience of being a woman. You still understand what it’s like to be a woman. You know the pains of having period cramps. You still know what it’s like to get catcalled. You still know what it’s like to be felt up randomly and you didn’t want it. You know what it’s like to have someone push themselves up on you.

Misogynoir is often used as a naming tool, a call to action to liberate black women.

However, interlocutors’ articulations of their racialized, gendered childhoods and adulthoods are important because they note the ways that embodied experiences of misogynoir do not go away regardless of how interlocutors now physically appear. In this

way, misogynoir can be understood as a product of patriarchy that impacts more than one gender.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I recount interlocutors' experiences of sexualization, colorism, tomboyism, and lesbianism when interpolated as black girls/pre-transition. Examining participants' childhoods as black girls is important because black girls "are largely presumed to be illegible at the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and age" (Owens 2017, 118). Transmen are impacted by misogynoir in the sense that it limits cultural understandings of the possibilities of black girlhood. One of the possibilities of black girlhood is black trans-masculinity, but it is a possibility that is often ignored by society. Furthermore, interlocutors experience misogynoir as black girls prior to transitioning and maintain this embodied knowledge. However, communities they were previously a part of and strangers they encounter in the present moment do not fully comprehend their experiences, leaving them in a state of Hyper Invisibility. Hyper Invisibility further solidifies my claims regarding racialized dysphoria by illuminating the space where cissexism and white supremacy meet to enact specific forms of erasure.

Black transmen are treated as black girls while growing up then treated as black men after transition, whether their transition is social or hormonal. The problem with these external expectations is that they are grounded in the assumption of stable gender categories. There is no black girl or black boy box to be neatly placed into. Interlocutors' experiences prove that individuals try and place children into these neat boxes and that children must do what is necessary to make a life for themselves within these constraints. As this chapter notes, participants come to understand themselves based on the

performances required for their assigned sex – even when their gender does not align with their own expressions.

Once they are then given a chance to “move” into a box that works for them better, they still carry the memory of those other requirements. Iris Marion Young explains that women and girls “learn to live out our existence in accordance with the definition that patriarchal culture assigns to us, we are physically inhibited, confined, positioned, and objectified” (152). For interlocutors, this learning is a phenomenological experience that does not disappear when one’s outward bodily expression changes; the sediments of patriarchal conditioning run deeper. Yet folks often dismiss or do not even consider interlocutors’ experiences before transitioning, and being read as cisgender men often results in exclusion from communities they were previously a part of, as well as invisibility within the transgender community.

C. Riley Snorton’s (2009) essay ““A New Hope”: The Psychic Life of Passing” provides important theorizations regarding the complicated role of passing for black transgender subjects and this essay helps shed light on interlocutors’ experiences. In this piece, Snorton challenges Sandy Stone’s (1994) request for trans subjects to resist passing because it reifies binaristic notions of gender and power. Stone asks folks to resist misrecognition – the moments when trans people are misrecognized as cisgender. Snorton’s essay argues that Stone’s request does not consider the productive possibilities of misrecognition and passing, especially for pre-operative, no-hormone transgender people. As Snorton points out, Stone’s argument rests on “a particular understanding of a post-operative transsexual body that implies that passing, even for trans people who have undergone surgeries, is a possibility that does not always already comprise a version of

failure” (79). This view of passing assumes that individuals move from a category of oppression to a category of privilege (Snorton 79).

Instead, Snorton contends that the *psychic* nature of passing must also be considered, explaining “the psychic act of passing is an essential part of what it means to know myself” (79). Utilizing his own experiences as a non-operative, no-hormone transsexual, he reframes moments of being read as a cisgender woman as productive because they are “not simply a failure to present as the gender I recognize myself to be, but also as instances of passing” (88). Snorton argues that “these moments of passing (of visibility and misrecognition) for a woman become the substance (a process of dissonance and disidentification) of my own psychic recognition as a trans man” (88). In other words, through interactions that some might consider to be mis-gendering, Snorton finds psychic space that further solidifies his understanding of himself as a trans man. Specifically, his expanded understanding of passing — one that relies on his own understanding of himself as someone who passes as a trans man, rather than external validation — gives him hope and helps him survive.

Snorton’s work importantly expands the concept of passing, and I would like to continue that expansion. Snorton’s work discusses the agency that occurs when individuals psychically pass, even if this experience is not validated by others. This is especially powerful for pre-op no hormone individuals. The experiences of my interlocutors showcase how passing/identifying as trans-masculine causes them to experience erasure as a part of their passing experience. This erasure not only means lack of material resources it also can mean psychological and communal isolation. So as Snorton notes, passing is not just going from an oppressed group to a privileged one. It is

about the entanglement of how one psychically understands one's self and how one is socially interpolated. In this way, we can understand how passing for interlocutors is not a process solely concerned with moving away from the abject by receiving recognition as masculine individuals, but more specifically an acceptance of the abject by desiring recognition that embraces the contradictions and knowledges that come with being *trans*-masculine (i.e. their black girlhoods and lives pre-transition). Similar to Snorton's relationship with misrecognition, the misrecognition (and the erasure experienced as a result) of passing as a black man aids in the formation of interlocutors' black trans-masculinities. As the next chapter explains, interlocutors utilize their knowledges of and socialization into black girlhood to help construct their versions of black trans-masculinity.

CHAPTER 4

“I LOVE MY TUMBLR BLOG.”: EXPLORING BLACK DIGITAL TRANS

EMBODIMENT

Framingham, MA 5:55 pm September 28, 2017

Canceled plans leave me at my friend Martel’s place in Massachusetts. I had flown into Boston that morning, planning to have brunch with Martel before he took me to meet TJ in Storrs, Connecticut. “We’ll link up tomorrow, that’s much better for me,” TJ explained via text a few hours before we were due to leave Boston. A stale light illuminates my face as I sit on Martel’s couch and open TJ’s blog. TJ’s blog does not feature the standard dark blue background Tumblr is known for; instead, his banner features the colors of the trans flag – various hues of pink, white, and blue – combined to produce a cloud landscape (see figure 1). In the center rests an image of his Bitmoji, shirtless, surfing a major wave. Immediately, I consider how TJ is using the affordance of creating an avatar. Researchers find that individuals transfer their understanding of themselves into their avatars and vice versa (Fox and Bailenson 2009). At the time of our interview, TJ had not started hormones or had any surgeries. However, his avatar allows him to buck the idea that avatars are supposed to be exact physical replicas of users. Instead, his visual depiction of self is one of possibility.

Figure 1.



TJ's avatar — and the practices of interlocutors more broadly — solidify the importance of understanding how black transmasculine individuals exploit the affordances and features of Tumblr to discuss their lives and create definitions of black trans-masculinity. As Eve Shapiro (2015) notes, “Not only does our offline life shape how we construct our online selves, but our virtual selves in turn shape who we are in offline life” (125-126). Drawing on this understanding, in this chapter I offer the concept of Black Digital Trans Embodiment (BDTE) as a byproduct of how interlocutors use Tumblr. Commonly, discussions about the relationship between technology, gender, and bodies, tend to emphasize medical transition and physical alteration. Conversely, BDTE considers the relationship between technology, gender, and bodies in order to envision interlocutors' selves as consisting not only of their literal black bodies (medically altered or unaltered), but of their blogs too. Simplified, this chapter argues that blogs are a *literal* part of interlocutors' embodiment, serving as key factors in a cyclical sequence in which the boundaries of online and offline collide and collapse to birth varied formulations of black trans-masculinity.

For instance, TJ's most recent content is various types of reblogs, mostly dealing with the subject of chronic depression. One post, a reblog from my own Tumblr, reads: "Here and queer unless I'm disassociating, then I'm still queer but somewhere else idk." TJ's struggles with mental illness, and his reblogging practices to discuss them, are a visceral reminder of the multifaceted nature of users' lives, as well as the multifunctionality of Tumblr posts. The post shown in figure two 1) provides insight into TJ's struggles with disassociation, 2) threads together a discussion of disability and queerness, and 3) highlights the social linkage, as well as the similarities of experiences and posting practices, between two black transmasculine individuals (he and I). Spellephant creates the post, I reblog from Spellephant, and TJ reblogs me, resulting in all three of us participating in a moment of recognition while subverting the common narrative identity work done online surrounding queerness and transness.



Figure 2.

Along with patterns of reblogging, hashtagging practices also represent a form of conversation and communal knowledge production. The usage of particular hashtags is a deliberate and productive method of challenging conventional forms of knowledge production, because it not only marks the information as dealing with transgender subject matter, but instances when this information specifically includes black and brown bodies. Users' deliberate decision to mark their race before their gender identity can be read as a desire to be recognized by individuals not only of the queer community, but those of racial kinship. Butler states "that to persist in one's own being is only possible on the condition that we are engaged in receiving and offering recognition" (31). Humans need to receive recognition for who they are and also reciprocate recognition. There are no attributes of dominant society that foster recognition for trans bodies of color. Butler continues: "... if we are not recognizable, if there are no norms of recognition by which we are recognizable, then it is not possible to persist in one's own being, and we are not possible beings; we have been foreclosed from possibility" (31). As chapters one and two outline, the discourses of dominant society are detrimental to the livelihood of the black trans community, and because of this, black trans bodies have taken it upon themselves to create and produce their own subversive moments of interaction and recognition. Stated another way, Tumblr serves as a means to achieve mutual recognition, helping lead to the co-production of black masculinity. Importantly, the rendering of BDTE makes the lives of interlocutors more livable.

To establish this chapter, I first draw from Hortense Spillers's theory of black flesh to argue that Tumblr with its affordances and features, is part of black embodiment for my interlocutors. Next, I focus on interlocutors' posting practices related to

photographs, original text posts, and the usage of specific hashtags. In doing so, I note how interlocutors' framing and composition of images, in combination with their use of the affordance of hashtags, helps to create an insular network of black transmasculine Tumblr users. I examine this network to highlight the flow and operationalization of black trans-masculinity through Tumblr, noting how the site functions as what black trans theorist Matt Richardson refers to as a vernacular epistemology. I conclude the chapter by exploring the implications of Black Digital Trans Embodiment for both interlocutors and non-trans bodies. Drawing upon these multiple avenues helps me reveal the salience of BDTE and showcase that blogs are a part of interlocutors' embodiment.

Expanding Black Flesh

My theory of BDTE relies on the concept of black flesh as it is articulated by Hortense Spillers in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" (1987). Spillers separates the 'body' and 'flesh' based on the historical legacies of racism, slavery, and colonization. Specifically, she notes, the 'body' is situated in a place of liberation. A sphere where one can (and does) have say and input regarding the meaning made from and through it. Yet Spillers notes that before 'the body' there is 'flesh.' Slavery relegated the black body, specifically the bodies of black women who produce black people, to that of 'flesh' or "that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography" (Spillers 67). In short, black people, as a result of their social location, have been stripped of the geo-political power needed to be considered a full body/human. Instead, we have flesh. Spillers ends "Mama's Baby" with a call to embrace the monstrosity of black flesh. Her call, as well as the separation of 'body' and 'flesh',

situates the racial and cultural formations of interlocutors' existence, and the ways they expand notions of black being.

Alexander G. Weheliye's *Habeas Viscus* (2014) extends Spillers' theorizations of 'flesh' and asks, what does it "mean to claim the monstrosity of the flesh as a site for freedom?" (125). Specifically, Weheliye argues that Giorgio Agamben's 'bare life' does not consider notions of humanity outside the law. Instead, Agamben's theorizations give law domain over what/whom is considered human and non-human (Weheliye 131). As such, man is reduced to white, heterosexual, and rational. Anybody else becomes "a legal no-body" (Weheliye 135). Conversely, *habeas viscus* as an analytic, calls upon black studies to refocus race in its examination of modern politics, and to consider the liberatory possibilities of black flesh. I take up Weheliye's call by showcasing BTDE as fertile ground to carve out a space beside/outside of the subjugation that defines humanity.

While Weheliye utilizes *habeas viscus* to consider liberation, C. Riley Snorton's (2018) *Black on Both Sides* engages Spillers' 'divided flesh' to highlight the ways that blackness lays the groundwork for gendered liberation. Snorton articulates blackness as "an enveloping environment and condition of possibility" (2). Similarly, Snorton explains, transness is not limited to recent manifestations, but instead, "a movement with no clear origin and no point of arrival" (2). Important to this chapter, he does not denote blackness as an inferior form of subjugation to transness, but conceptualizes blackness and transness as categories that overlap and function similarly (2). The overall argument of *Black on Both Sides* relies on the work of Clair Colebrook and her argument of

‘transitivity’ to trace the passage of blackness and transness into the cultural imaginary as non-human.

However, it is Snorton’s concept of “fungibility” that is most imperative to understanding BDTE. Fungibility is the ability to replace or be replaced by another identical item. Snorton explains that during slavery, gender and race carried fungible qualities. He notes, “gender indefiniteness would become a crucial modality of political and cultural maneuvering within figurations of blackness, illustrated, for example, by the frequency with which narratives of fugitivity included cross-gendered modes of escape” (56). Formerly enslaved people such as William and Ellen Craft would pass for white and alter their gender presentation in order to reach freedom. Ellen could pass for white, dressed in masculine attire, in order to mimic being her husband’s owner. While Ellen was not white, nor what we would consider present-day transgender, her and her husband’s actions showcase how “captive flesh figures a critical genealogy for modern transness, as chattel persons gave rise to an understanding of gender as mutable and as an amendable form of being” (57). Hence, the Crafts’ gender was malleable because their blackness had already denoted them as part of the realm of non-human. Therefore, they were able to play with the contours of gender in order to obtain freedom. Understanding the fungible nature of Blackness allows for new ontological understandings of transness.

Drawing on this theoretical framework, I argue the practices my interlocutors engage in, such as posting selfies and constructing hashtags, are in line with the historical legacy of black bodies in this country. While the conditions interlocutors live under contemporaneously are not the same as during chattel slavery, the work they engage in — discussed in this chapter as well as the preceding ones — mimics techniques used by

those such as the Crafts: manipulating the boundaries of technology, race, and gender in hopes of a more just life.

The Affordances of Tumblr

Tumblr is a part of a larger system of information technologies that we use to interact with the world around us. Information technologies are technologies that enable “communication between individuals through computer-based hardware and software, internet access and networking” (Shapiro 36). These include email, social networking, and gaming. Understanding information technologies is important to understanding interlocutors and their use of Tumblr, because these technologies impact us all and come to act as “technologies of the self.” One of the four main technologies theorized by Foucault (1988), technologies of the self:

permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (18).

Technologies of the self are ways of creating and recreating who we are as individuals in an effort to realize what we feel is our most true selves. For instance, bodybuilding is one example, and extreme tattooing is another. This chapter understands Tumblr as a technology of self, and investigates its role in the co-production of black trans-masculinity.

My interlocutors are able to utilize Tumblr to help with this co-production because of the specific affordances of the website. Affordances are “the properties of a medium or technology that make particular activities, ways of interacting, or experiences possible. Affordances are all the possible actions a particular technology allows” (Shapiro

122). The affordances of Tumblr play an important role in the identity work in which users of the platform participate. Identity work is the “range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities” (Snow and Anderson 1987, 1348). Scholars note sites such as Tumblr have affordances that make them especially amenable to identity work. These include anonymity, interaction with a real but non-visible audience, and the possibility for global interaction. Collectively, these affordances encourage the psychological factors needed to carry out identity work (Danah Boyd 2008).

Even with these affordances, Tumblr is not a perfect space. First, I am aware that individuals need access to the internet and technologies such as smartphones to enact BDTE. These accessibility issues limits the overall prospects of BDTE. Furthermore, Tumblr notoriously has a small staff compared to the number of users, and historically they make things worse more often than they make them better. For instance, shortly after completing my digital observations, Tumblr changed the viewing status of posts. No longer can users see when someone else originally posted something. This seemingly is a small change, but for trans users who may be tracking physical changes, this is a big disruption to their archive and how others interact with it and them. Moreover, the same affordances such as hashtags that interlocutors use to facilitate mutual recognition, can and are used by TERFs and hate groups to harass and agitate trans communities. In this way, the digital continues to mimic the material. Thus, I am not claiming a utopic articulation of black trans embodiment via Tumblr. Instead, I argue that interlocutors’ practices on Tumblr should be viewed in combination with the work they conduct elsewhere in life to survive and thrive. While Tumblr’s affordances — such as

anonymity, reblogging, instant messaging, and unlimited character counts for original text posts — differentiate the platform from other social networks, it is the deliberate use of these affordances, not the site itself, that offers interlocutors a distinct opportunity to co-produce their trans-masculinities and expand black embodiment.

Selfies and Their Construction

Mansfield, Connecticut 5:00pm September 28, 2017

“This shit is majestic, bro!” Martel breaks the silence as we approach the exit marked “University of Connecticut Storrs.” The beginning of fall converts the trees into various shades of orange and red, making unremarkable Mansfield beautiful. Off the exit, a Staples, a Kohl’s, and a local liquor store greet us. My hotel – the Best Western Mansfield – is located across from a McDonald’s on the main street in town. Martel drops me off, and we agree he will retrieve me in a few days’ time. I settle into my room, freshen up, gather my necessary items, and call a Lyft to make my way to campus.

Checking the length of my ride time — over 20 minutes — I realize that Storrs is not actually Mansfield. From the backseat of the Lyft, I notice the rural WASP-y nature of things. The landscape reminds me of a *Gilmore Girls* set: large, manicured New England farm houses, tucked away from the highway in oversized yards, line the main route towards the university. On the whole, Storrs is a small village made up of upper middle class residents. Individuals connected to the University of Connecticut make up most of Storrs’ population. The university has a student population close to 20,000, while Storrs itself is under 16,000 total residents. UConn is primarily white, with a minority student population of close to 35%. Faculty of color make up around 20% of the teaching community. Importantly, sports are integral to the university’s identity. It is on sports

teams that you will find the majority of the racial diversity on UConn's campus (UConn 2019 Fact Sheet).

My driver pulls into the northeast section of campus, and the large academic buildings create an immediate contrast to the flatness of the surrounding village. The sudden change from vast openness to bustling crowded campus is startling and makes me feel discombobulated. This incongruity between the campus and the white, rural community of Storrs shapes TJ's daily experiences of black trans-masculinity. It is 7 pm by the time my driver drops me off near my final destination. Walking towards the student center to meet TJ, my light jacket is no match for Connecticut's harsh winds; I pick up my pace as a measure of kindness to my body. I find TJ waiting for me on the first floor, near the food court. He is wearing a pullover sweater, glasses with gold frames, low top Vans sneakers, two diamond earrings, and a burgundy head visor that reads "cool" across the front. His curly fade sticking out of the top completes his look — to say he has swag is an understatement.

We grab smoothies from Freshens and make our way to the second floor to ensure we have some privacy. Following the format of all the interviews, we begin by discussing his childhood. I learn that both of his parents are professionals and that growing up, his family "was definitely upper middle class." He lived a materially comfortable life and has a pretty decent relationship with his family. He is majoring in computer science and math, and explains to me that his choice of major is based in part on a desire to acquire a job with a high salary following graduation. TJ's acknowledgment of his middle-class upbringing explains his Tumblr handle. It is a reference to a line from Childish Gambino's "IV. Sweatpants" in which Gambino notes: "And I'm born rich, life ain't fair,

it's silver spoon coon, ho." UrbanDictionary.com defines "silver spoon coon" as "one who received their success because of their privileged upbringing." Over time, I'll come to understand just how his class impacts his understanding of blackness and transness. For now, we spend the rest of the evening discussing his conceptualizations of gender and sexuality. He tells me stories of previous relationships and his aspirations for the future. Eventually, it grows late and we agree to meet again the next day.

At the same location on the following day, we continue our conversation, this time shifting to Tumblr and his usage of the site. He expresses his affection for the site and we begin discussing his posting practices. My interrogation of the ways that black transmasculine individuals exploit the features, affordances, and practices of Tumblr to create definitions of black trans-masculinity quickly comes to the forefront. Based on conversations with TJ and other interlocutors, I learn that one of the main strategies for self-definition is posting original photographic content — specifically, interlocutors utilize selfies to articulate and help co-produce their trans-masculinities.

Superficially, selfies are regarded as acts of narcissism; however, several scholars note the nuanced role selfies play in our lives. As Senft and Baym (2015) explain, the selfie is "a photographic object that initiates the transmission of human feeling in the form of a relationship" (1589). Additionally, a selfie serves as "a practice – a gesture that can (and is often intended to send) different messages to different individuals, communities, and audiences" (Senft and Baym, 2015, 1589). Moreover, the selfie operates as political activism not only within black communities, but in many social groups on Tumblr. For instance, when discussing femme queer culture on Tumblr, Nichole Nicholson notes, "'the selfie' is not just an innocuous practice of self-

indulgence, or the sign of a cultural downfall as predicted by columnists for mainstream news, but a viable political and personal engagement” (2014, 72). She determines that the selfie serves as a way for femmes on Tumblr to perform femininity, as “the femme identity is constructed by users participating in the community via repetition and affirmation of the aesthetics” (2014, 74). Importantly, for users, the decision to control one’s image is venerable. It is not just about controlling one’s image, but also about controlling the articulation of self in a time and place where images of marginalized people are often outside of their control, and instead used to shore up dominant, privileged, normative subjects.

Importantly, I understand selfie production to be a part of what Aaron Hess describes as the “selfie assemblage.” Hess conceptualizes selfies as assemblages in the line of Deleuzian thinking. He explains:

the selfie assemblage is a constellation of multiple elements of existence within contemporary technological culture that expresses—even copes with—the affective tensions of networked identity: the longing for authenticity through digitality, the conflicted need for fleeting connection with others, the compulsion to document ourselves in spaces and places, and the relational intimacy found with our devices (2015, p. 1631).

In short, selfies operate within an assemblage that consists of both digital and metaphysical aspects. The selfie assemblage is made of four parts: the self, the physical space, the device, and the network. The self is produced via the captured image of one’s physical being. The physical space denotes where the selfie is captured. The device refers to the tools with which selfies are captured. Previously, digital cameras were utilized; however, selfies are now primarily associated with cellular devices. Finally, selfies help create networks, as individuals post selfies with the goal of inciting others to interact with

their post. The interactive nature of selfies helps coagulate the concept of BDTE. Our constant connection to our phones – to what we consider digital space — and the ability to constantly capture ourselves via selfies reaffirms our material existence. Farman (2012) contends that “since the two realms are so intertwined, the embodied practice of space on mobile networks strongly reinforces our sense of embodiment in the material sphere” (23). Interlocutors can (and do) constantly archive and state their existence, and have that existence affirmed by others.

Anyone who has taken a selfie knows that one does not simply snap a photo and post it. Instead, the practice of a selfie is one that is performative and often requires taking multiple photos, editing the best one(s), and *then* posting it/them. TJ and other interlocutors have a specific process of taking selfies, and an additional process for determining which ones get posted. Holistically, the criteria for posting a photo is if it makes the interlocutor feel good. Every individual noted they desire to feel good about the selfies they post and specifically want to feel good about how they looked in the photo. Moreover, interlocutors note that feeling good about a selfie usually means to look masculine in it. Interlocutors never state that appearing cisgender in a selfie makes them feel good and thus makes the picture worth posting.

Before TJ identified as trans, he had more photos of himself online; however, shortly before our interview, he deleted a lot of photos because, “That's not how I want to present myself or show people how I look.” “[Are you] wanting to post after transition, or after hormones?” I inquire. He explains that dysphoria is a major factor as to why he currently does not post many selfies; however, he notes, “Sometimes my friend might

take a really good picture of me where I'm like, "Wow, I look very masculine in that. I like that.""

Similarly, when looking at an image of himself, Duane, 21, from Toledo explains, "Okay, yeah, I could pass. Not necessarily saying I could pass for a cis dude, because I never aspire to pass for a cis guy, but looking at my photo of me like, 'I'm comfortable with this one.' I feel like I look more, I don't know, I guess, masc in this one." Duane explicitly states he does not wish to look cisgender, and his stance aligns with TJ and other interlocutors. Their conceptualization(s) of black transmasculinity do not visually mimic cisness, but instead embrace fluent and nuanced articulations of masculinity.

Steps of Construction

Importantly, interlocutors conduct specific steps to ensure their desired look of masculinity is achieved. For TJ, acquiring as much distance as possible between himself and the camera is an integral step in his process of creating masculine images. "I think having maybe distance helps me look more masculine maybe... I feel like too close and doesn't get the right angle that I want."

"Can you talk to me more about what you like your angles to look like?" I probe.

"Yeah, one of my pictures that I use on like, I think it's my Facebook profile picture, Twitter, is this one where I'm like looking to the side and I'm smiling. And it was like a genuine smile too." He lights up remembering the photo being taken. He continues, "So yeah, typically ones that don't show my face that much or I'm looking to the side where you can like see the jawline, or more masculine physique."

Here, TJ gives insight into the practices of taking the photos. For him, appearing genuine and looking away from the camera are integral. Angling his face away from the

camera solidifies that he is not interested in his “real” face being seen; instead, the correct interpolation of masculinity is the driving force behind his posting decisions. A smile is also vital to Duane’s posting decisions. He notes, “I like very few photos that I take, but if I do, most of the time I’m smiling because I like my smile... so smiling is definitely one of the bigger things for me when I take a photo.” Both TJ and Duane are interested in photographs that make them look more masculine, and both smile as a means to create said look. Their practices 1) destabilize the stereotypical views of black masculinity and trans-masculinity noted in the introduction and 2) showcase the conscious effort that goes into producing images of the self.

Figure 3.



Kai, 20, from Atlanta, further solidifies the effort that interlocutors embark upon to ensure photos look masculine. For starters, Kai posts more in the summer because he feels his pictures are better then. I crack a joke about his “melanin popping” and he elaborates, “It’s that. Also, I like, something about the summer, I work out so much more intensely than I do any other time of the year. So, I just take more pictures. I’m more

confident.” Kai is different from other interlocutors in that he notes specific times of year when he feels more comfortable with himself. This makes sense, as weather impacts clothing and mood, which in turn impacts expressions of masculinity and gender. Interestingly, Kai engages with multiple technologies of the self here. He both works out more, by using weights to change his body, and takes photographs to construct iterations of himself that he feels more confident about.

When discussing the photograph, Kai tells me he only posts selfies from the face up. This is the case for the majority of my interlocutors, and a technique I also utilize on my blog. Many individuals of all subject positions only post neck-up selfies to their digital platforms; however, when I consider what this means for black trans bodies, I think about dysphoria and the manner in which interlocutors desire to be interpolated. Selfies that capture interlocutors from the neck up can pass more than photos featuring a full-length body, regardless of whether the person is medically transitioning or not. For instance, if the person is on hormones, it can help draw focus to emerging facial hair. Or, if one has not had top surgery, it can remove a large chest from view. In this way, we see interlocutors’ BDTE actively flourishing. By utilizing certain framing techniques before posting, interlocutors curate a version of self that is expressed in the digital, simultaneously expanding and solidifying formations of who they are. The agency and power embedded in this expansion of black flesh is exhilarating.

Finally, I would like to note that a big aspect of Kai's practice is seeking approval from others to make sure his photos look masculine. Kai explains, "If I send it to my girlfriend first and she'll respond if she likes it." Kai explains that he gets approval or input from others, but it is his girlfriend's opinion he seeks the most. He is not the only interlocutor who seeks others' feedback. Like Kai, Alex, 27 from Phoenix asks a femme companion about which photo he should post. When discussing his own methods, Alex tells me, "I'm talking to this girl that I'm planning on fucking when I go to Arkansas. And I was like, "Tell me which one I should post."" This reveals two things: 1) interlocutors value the opinions of others, particularly those they are romantically linked to, in helping them determine which photos are masculine and worthy of posting, and 2) interlocutors go through a significant amount of labor in order to curate a particular digital self-image. They decide distance and angles, put on smiles, select optimum seasons for photos, only post from the neck up, and get the approval of others, all before posting. This process is aligned with other forms of work interlocutors conduct in the construction of their black trans-masculinity.

Figure 4.



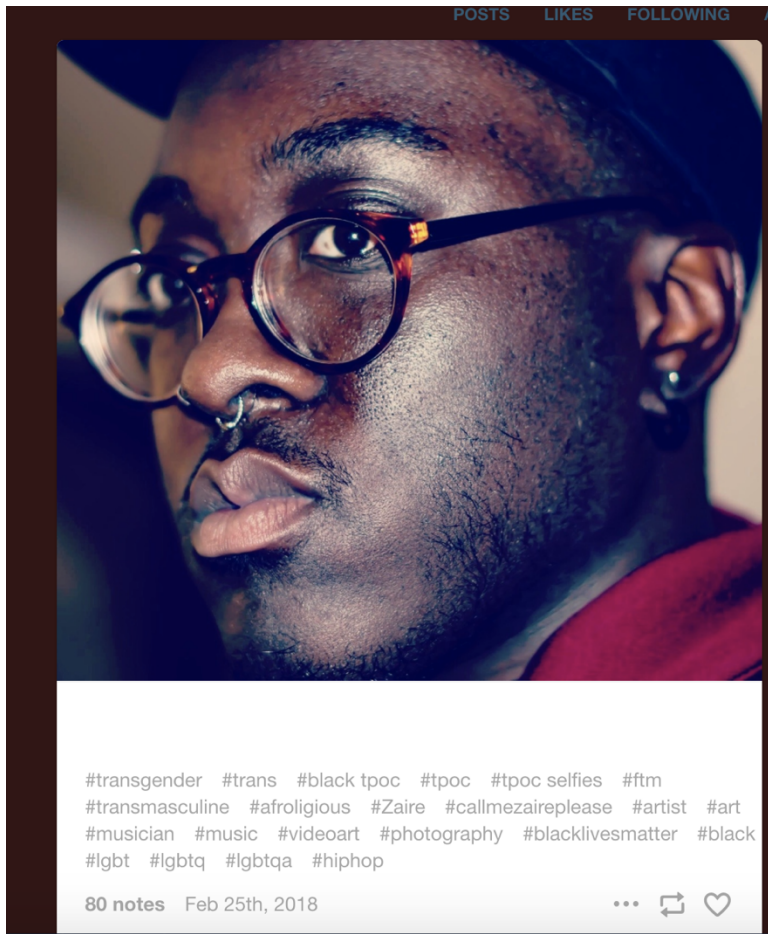
Transing the Hashtag

Mansfield, Connecticut 7:00pm September 29, 2017

On the next day, I am still at the UConn student center with TJ. Our discussion of his Tumblr is still on the table, except we are now discussing his usage of hashtags. Similar to my interlocutors' photographic posting practices, hashtags are important parts of their self-construction because they serve as pre-existing codes that reveal how users mark content. Twitter explains hashtagging as a way for users to "index keywords or topics" and "to easily follow topics they are interested in" (Twitter Support Page). Akin to Twitter, Tumblr allows users to create, follow, and search hashtags. Users are encouraged to use hashtags to mark content with anything the user finds relevant. This allows others to find additional content that features that same hashtag. Thus, using particular hashtags can increase the reach of a post (Wang et al., 2016), and allows others to find topics that interest them (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015).

Interlocutors and other black transmasculine individuals, myself included, use tags such as #blackftm, #blacktransman, #QTPOC (Queer Trans Person of Color), #TMOOC (Trans Person of Color), and #blacktransmen. These hashtags are commonly used in combination with generic tags associated with trans life, such as #transgender, #FTM, and #VitaminT. These hashtags reflect a racializing of the common tags associated with the larger transgender community. As mentioned, tagging posts with these markers allows all individuals to indicate the subject matter of their posts, but for interlocutors, it allows for a distinct and deliberate marking of knowledge production outside of dominant forms — a knowledge that is intentionally aimed at black transmasculine people, and one that expands their BDTE.

Figure 5.



Meredith Clark’s point “that hashtags serve as mediators for black culture in the virtual and physical worlds” (2014, 87) provides insight into conceptualizing black transmasculine hashtag usage. Interlocutors racialize trans hashtags and force a reframing of how transmasculinity is understood. For instance, the literal conflation of traditional #FTM tag with #Black can be understood as an acknowledgment that, for interlocutors, race very much influences the experiences they face. For them, there is no separation of #Black and #FTM; instead, it simply becomes #BlackFTM. Furthermore, specific hashtags offer visibility into how interlocutors see themselves.

On Tumblr, hashtags show up on the bottom of a post as hyperlinks that lead to a page featuring other posts using the same hashtag. During the posting process, hashtags are frequently the last component added after an interlocutor has composed/taken the photograph, added filters, and any text captions. Moreover, it is the norm for a post to feature multiple hashtags, hashtags that overlap, and hashtags that are instructional. For instance, in figure five, Zaire utilizes a bevy of the hashtags I mention, but he also includes #callmezaireplease. This selfie was posted February 25, 2018, when Zaire was in the earlier stages of his hormonal transition.

His deliberate hashtag usage is twofold. First, it functionally informs users how to refer to him. And by doing so, it also activates his BDTE. By deploying this specific hashtag, Zaire curates a space in which deadnaming is obstructed before its inception, once again simultaneously expanding and solidifying formations of who he is. Interlocutors come to learn hashtags and how to deploy them from other users and recommendations from Tumblr.

Speaking with Alex, I ask, “How'd you learn about these hashtags?” He describes his process, “I search other hashtags and they were just like stuff that other people ... I went all the really popular trans Instagrammers and YouTubers and I looked at what they tagged their shit as. And I just stole their tags.” Alex’s “stealing” is common and how other interlocutors also learn which hashtags were popular and common. Duane explains, “One of the first hashtags that I started to search on Tumblr was the black FTM tag.” As I note in the introduction, the #BlackFTM tag is also how I came to know the community that would serve as the foundation of this project. Interlocutors understand that others search their tags, and thus they mark their content in ways that follow the norms of

affordance usage on Tumblr. Kai tells me, “I have a whole tag on my blog for all the things trans related that I post so people can get to it easier ‘cause I post a lot of resources. And people ask me a lot of questions.” In this way, Kai’s blog becomes an archive of information for his mutuals.

This process is not limited to trans specific content either. For instance, TJ has a specific practice as it relates to tagging texts posts that relate to mental illness. “Usually if it's a text post and it's like about suicide or depression I'll hashtag it depression, or if it's really trans related then I'll do like, trans, FTM, transmasculine, non-binary,” he tells me. This utilization of the tagging affordance archives content in a particular way and authorizes a nuanced understanding of black transmasculine experiences – one not devoid of struggles with mental illness. In addition to using tags to archive material in a particular way, interlocutors utilize the affordance of hashtags for the purpose of their posts being seen and circulated in a specific manner.

Continuing our discussion of how he found/finds and deploys certain hashtags, I ask Alex, “Did you then just take these hashtags to Tumblr?”

“Some of them I found on Tumblr. So whichever ones has the most notes, 'cause I'm trying to build my following or whatever, I'd pick the ones that had the most reactions and notes to them.” Alex responds.

“Gotchu.” I hum out while I write with fever. My lack of eye contact encourages him to continue talking:

I was trying to be smart about my shit. I also then went and followed all the really popular people, like popular Tumblr people. And then I found the most popular Tumblr notes, and then I went in the notes section of those and then picked people that really liked those posts and then followed them ... And then reblogged some of their stuff so they would go look at my page.

The posts he is discussing are posts related to transgender topics and experiences. Once again, Alex approaches his usage of hashtags with the same deliberation he does with his selfie production.

“So you're strategic.” I offer him.

“No, yeah. It was a total planned out situation... I was like, "I know how to do this." I did the same thing with Instagram, too.” Alex evokes an intentionality here, and I further discuss the labor associated with this strategic approach in chapter two. Furthermore, we again see Alex, like other interlocutors, manipulating affordances to create a cohesive sense of self across platforms.

Alex's hunting of hashtags in hopes of more interaction is not unusual. Known as the sixth motivation of hashtagging, *bonding* “becomes possible by means of an “internal” language that only members of an insider group would understand and from having shared experiences that inspire bonding-motivated hashtags” (Rauschnabel, Sheldon, and Herzfeldt, 2019). Alex and other interlocutors use the insular hashtags of the black transmasculine community to archive material, provide instruction, and create bonds. When I consider the experiences interlocutors discuss in chapters one and two, the way their lives are rooted in the intersections of various oppressions, I understand how hashtags function to help Tumblr content serve as “queer vernacular epistemologies, or forms of expression, that comment on and resist the oppression of queer sexualities and genders, as well as create queer kinship networks, communities, and alternatives to diasporic displacement” (Richardson 7). Hashtags serve as vehicles to form queer community, withstand isolation, and continue the legacy of survival set forth by

individuals like the Crafts. Ultimately, these epistemologies and expansions of community are one of the greatest benefits of interlocutors' manipulation of Tumblr's affordances.

Interlocutors note that they follow "a lot of transmasculine blogs that either talk about the struggles of being trans, like dealing with dysphoria and stuff. Or just like helping give tips on how to appear more masculine, or tips for trans guys on how to do their hair or stuff like that" (TJ). From these other blogs, they are able to continuously learn about hormones and the material realities of transmasculine life. Duane tells me he uses Tumblr to look up "how you go about getting T. The different changes it does to your body." Duane's usage highlights the educational and knowledge-peddling nature of Tumblr. At the time of our interview, Duane was not on hormones, and Tumblr served as a way for his trans self to flourish. He does not need to have direct access to a doctor, but can still consume information.

And it is not just about finding medical information. The reflection of self, back to interlocutors – the formation of community – is integral. Continuing his thoughts on community, Duane pointedly explains:

See, finding other black trans men on Tumblr was the first moment that I'm like, "Oh, okay." See, I knew obviously, conceptually, black trans people exist very definitively, but I never knew any black trans people, specifically black trans men, and seeing them on Tumblr was probably one of the more affirming things for me. And then being able to see so many people that are black, and are trans, and are masc, and the different representations of that was something that was so pivotal, and it was an amazing thing because it helped start me on my journey of accepting me and feeling comfortable in my identity as a trans man because now I also see other ... because, you know, yeah, I never really felt comfortable with the concept of ... being a trans man has been through a white filter, I perceived, so seeing it from a different perspective and seeing that representation was something that was very, very important for me.

Tumblr literally helped Duane take something from the conceptual realm to that of the material. As I note in the introduction, the majority of trans representations feature white and feminine trans people. The cultural projection of transgender excludes individuals like Duane. Fortunately, the practices of other black transmasculine people on Tumblr led to his moment of realization. By seeing others, Duane was able to see a possibility for himself. In this way, we see the start of his BDTE forming. His embodiment is altered and changed because he was able to envision new possibilities for himself — possibilities presented on Tumblr. He is not alone; TJ further highlights the solemnity of being a part of Tumblr's black transmasculine community:

I think that other black trans guys and I can relate better since we match in race and gender in a way. So having more identity similarities even though we might experience a lot of different things, and that is just creating visibility in the trans community for people of color, and it kind of just is like a reflection of me, or just seeing the trans person of color, black trans guy, I don't know it just *feels like it mirrors me*. I don't know how to explain it. Just kind of like I'm seeing myself (emphasis mine).

Duane echoes this:

When I was first coming into my gender identity was their [white transmen] representation. They had so many people to look up to, and even like ... because the standard was essentially the white trans man, and that's kind of where all the conversations were centered around, so their accessibility to more information that kind of mirrored experiences that they would go through and maybe have, but not necessarily the ones that I dealt with.

TJ and Duane's comments remind me of the words of writer Junot Diaz. Talking with students at Bergen Community College in New Jersey in 2009, he asked:

You guys know about vampires? You know, vampires have no reflections in a mirror? There's this idea that monsters don't have reflections in a mirror. And what I've always thought isn't that monsters don't have reflections in a mirror. It's that if you want to make a human being into a monster, deny them, at the cultural level, any reflection of themselves. And growing up, I felt like a monster in some ways. I didn't see myself reflected at all. I was like, "Yo, is something wrong with

me? That the whole society seems to think that people like me don't exist? And part of what inspired me, was this deep desire that before I died, I would make a couple of mirrors. That I would make some mirrors so that kids like me might see themselves reflected back and might not feel so monstrous for it."

The lack of digital mirrors is a very real and important problem, because digital trans spaces are often filtered through whiteness and rarely reflect the experiences of black and brown people. Duane and TJ's experiences reveal how the daily cultural formations interlocutors deal with spill over into digital representations. The lack of reflection of themselves they saw is a part of the creation of monsters that Diaz discusses. It implicitly states that black masculinity does not and should not exist; further solidifying the need for interlocutors to create their own mirrors via specific practices.

The network formed as a result of specific hashtag usage provides interlocutors (and others) an opportunity to collectivize around trans experiences without the minimization of discussions of race. King Kunta sums things up, explaining his thoughts on the black transmasculine community: "Even if I don't mark it with an interaction, it still happened, which is another thing about social media that's odd to me. 'Cause it's like, yeah, "If a tree falls and no one hears it ... " But what if a tree falls and someone hears it, but they just don't tweet about it? Does it still happen?

The answer is, yes! Even if interlocutors or other black transmasculine individuals never interact with each other, the reflection and mirroring still occurs. As images six, seven, and eight show, when one searches the #BlackFTM tag, they are presented with a deluge of beautiful black transmasculine existence.

Figure 6.

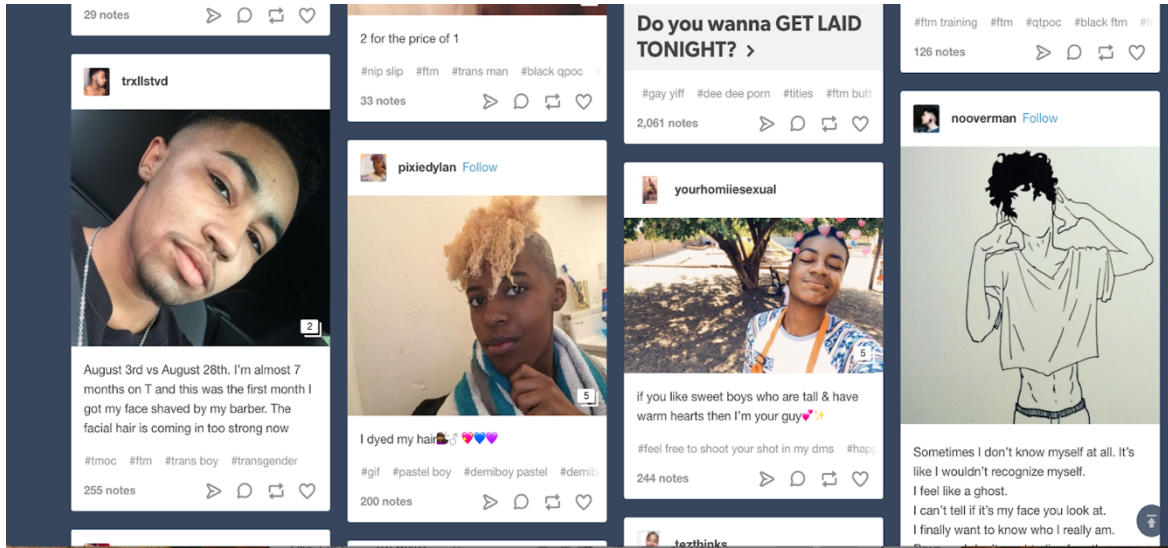


Figure 7.

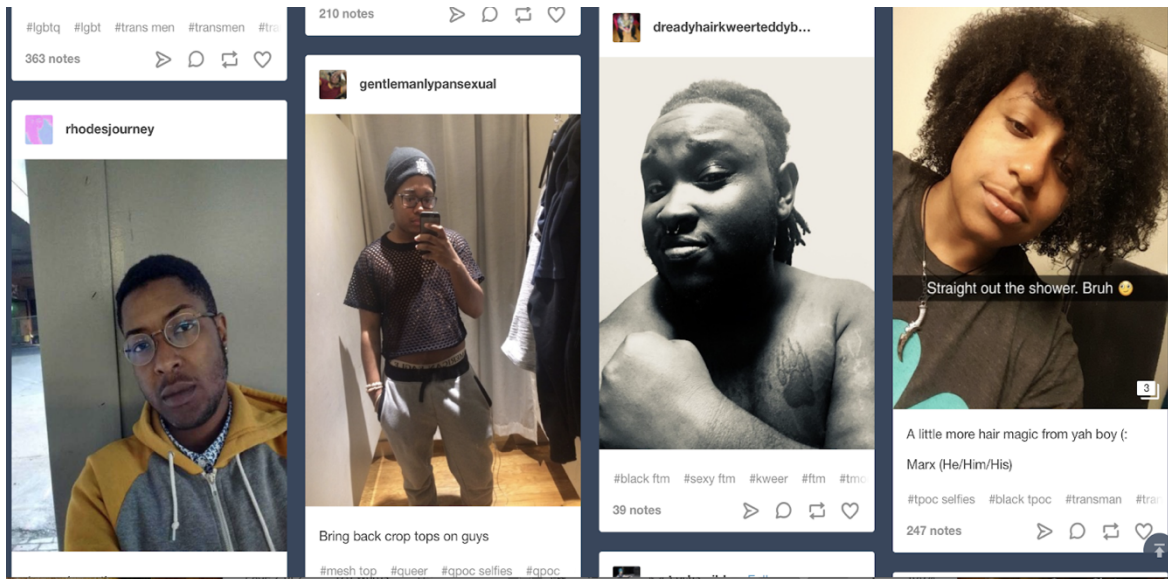
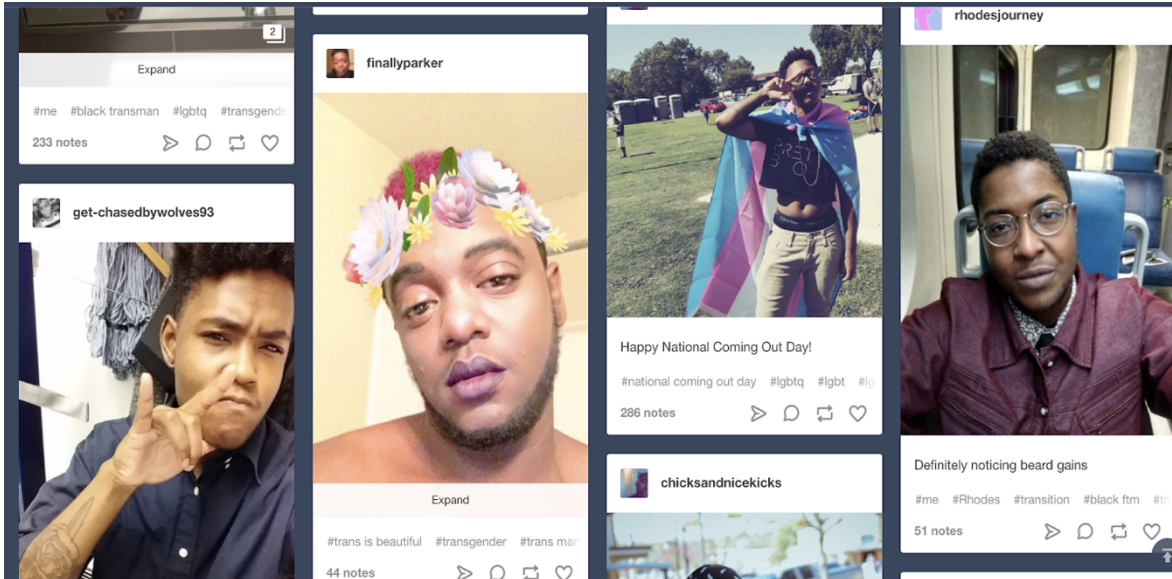


Figure 8.



Conclusion

This chapter explores the practices of interlocutors solidify the importance of understanding how black transmasculine individuals exploit the affordances and features of Tumblr to discuss their lives and create definitions of black trans-masculinity. I found that interlocutors exploit affordances such as the ability to post selfies and the usage of hashtags to create, archive, and circulate content of import to them. This exploitation of Tumblr's affordances and features leads me to present the concept of Black Digital Trans Embodiment (BDTE). BDTE explains how interlocutors simultaneously experience and understand their blackness and transness in both digital and material realms. The practices interlocutors engage in are in line with the historical legacy of black people redefining common sense categories for the aim of a happier life. Ultimately, BDTE ushers in possibility.

So maybe an interlocutor feels like they do not pass in an individual image captured of their physical self; however, the combination of the image plus the hashtag

produces a moment of recognition for them. It literally serves as a vernacular epistemology to teach whomever is also on the other end how they should be interpolating the interlocutor. For instance, Duane might not be able to get this recognition when he goes to his mother's church on Sunday in Northwest Toledo, because he has not had top surgery and does not "pass," but he gets it via Tumblr from people he has not met in person and this is profound. It is disruptive. It is hieroglyphics in a code – an algorithm to tell you how to interpolate others, and their literal bodies.

The findings presented in this chapter solidify the ever-evolving, co-constitutive relationship between interlocutors and the site Tumblr as it pertains to producing aspects of their racialized gendered selves. This relationship is an ever changing one; as such, subsequent chapters continue to explore the role of Tumblr in co-producing interlocutors' black trans-masculinity. These chapters further situate the contexts which inform how and why interlocutors use Tumblr in the first place. The next chapter argues for a reconceptualization of dysphoria from that of disordered feeling, to a process of surviving and thriving. Specifically, I analyze the labor interlocutors conduct to embark on this movement, and the role Tumblr affordances play in that process.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON BLACK TRANS MASCULINITY

When I started this journey, I set out to learn how black transmasculine individuals utilize Tumblr to create specific articulations of black trans-masculinity. I quickly discovered a complicated dialogic web between the material realities of interlocutors and their digital-embodied selves. As such, the previous chapters interrogate the ways that outside interpolation impacts interlocutors' black trans-masculinities. Specifically, I questioned: How does black trans-masculinity operate through Tumblr? How do black trans-masculine individuals exploit the features, affordances, and practices of Tumblr to create definitions of black trans-masculinity? How do these definitions influence online and offline formulations of black trans-masculinity? To explore these questions, I examined the social conditions that lead black transmasculine people to articulate their racialized transgender masculinity via posts, selfies, hashtags, and re-blogs, and the ways that articulation relates back to their lived experience of black trans-masculinity. I analyzed these dynamics through a theoretical and methodological approach that draws upon feminist theory, queer of color critique, intersectionality, phenomenology, somatechnics, and participatory ethnography.

Utilizing intersectional thinking ensured my work interrogated the multiplicity of interlocutors' experiences, as well as pushed back against "common sense" notions surrounding gender and sexuality. Because phenomenology as a theory and method is used to explore phenomena expressly from the perspective of being and embodiment (Ahmed 2006), my phenomenological orientation toward trans experience emphasizes embodiment while allowing for conversation about the ways a felt sense is a result of,

and subject to, cultural interpretation (Salamon 2010, 2-10). Stated another way, phenomenology gave me a way to articulate that interlocutors “feel” transgender, while still exploring how curations of trans are socially produced. Finally, my use of somatechnic studies enabled me to explore the relationship between interlocutors and technology. Somatechnics does not frame technology as passive objects used by humans. Instead, as a field, it encourages a viewpoint that recognizes the mutually constitutive nature of both parties. Humans need technology, just as technology needs humans. For me this means understanding humanity as always technological, and approaching questions of power, racism, and transphobia with this in mind.

This theoretical edifice helped produce three important chapters. Chapter one explains the historical and social context surrounding black masculinity and how it causes interlocutors to experience racialized dysphoria. In this chapter, I rearticulate dysphoria not as an inherently internal feeling, but as an emotional response to external stimuli directed at black transgender embodiment. Conceptualizing dysphoria as an emotion rather than a feeling allows for a more expansive understanding of the experience that includes both feelings and physiological responses to external events — an expansion that lays the groundwork for my phenomenological articulation of dysphoria as an effect of being out of space or time, a disruption from flow. Specifically, I examine how this sense of disruption materializes outside of gender to reveal what I call “racialized dysphoria.” In its simplest articulation, racialized dysphoria describes how interlocutors experience dysphoria not because of gendered experiences but because of racialized ones.

While interlocutors experienced racialized dysphoria prior to transition as well, chapter one attends to the ways that racialized dysphoria has been shaped by the historical legacy of black manhood — specifically, the longstanding tradition of black men being viewed as threats and societal problems. Importantly, interlocutors move through these instances of racialized dysphoria by conducting what I call “dysphoria work,” which I conceptualize as activities involving mental, physical, or spiritual effort, done to achieve the result of surviving through moments of various forms of dysphoria. Acquiring hormones, altering public bathroom practices, and code-switching are all examples of dysphoria work.

Chapter two continues these conversations, presenting abject legibility and hyper invisibility as exemplars of racialized dysphoria. I utilize queer of color critique, intersectionality, and feminist theory to examine the pervasiveness of misogyny and misogynoir. Black transmen’s experiences are unique because they understand societal erasure as black women prior to starting hormone replacement therapy and experience hyper-visibility as black men after treatment. To understand this better, I explore interlocutors’ girlhoods and their ongoing impact on their understanding, construction, and performance of masculinity. Interlocutors describe experiencing abject violence as a result of being ‘legible’ as black girls via social interactions, the policing of their bodies, and the sexualization they face. Following social and medical transition, interlocutors are viewed and treated as black men, causing them to experience hyper invisibility. On one hand they are extremely visible as black men, while on the other hand, they remain invisible as trans people and individuals who have experienced black girlhood.

Chapter three showcases how interlocutors utilize the affordances and features of Tumblr to erase the lines between the corporeal and the digital. Specifically, chapter three destabilizes taken-for-granted notions of bodies by articulating black transgender digital embodiment. I take the collective knowledge discussed in chapters one and two and use it to understand how and why interlocutors utilize Tumblr. In this chapter I present Black Digital Trans Embodiment, or BDTE. BDTE considers the relationship between technology, gender, and bodies in order to envision interlocutors' selves as consisting not only of their literal black bodies (medically altered or unaltered), but of their blogs too. In short, this chapter argues that blogs are a *literal* part of interlocutors' embodiment, serving as key factors in a cyclical sequence in which the boundaries of online and offline collide and collapse to birth varied formulations of black trans-masculinity. How is this accomplished? By interlocutors utilizing and exploiting the features and affordances of Tumblr. Recognizing Tumblr as an integral component of recognition and validation for black trans-masculine individuals forces us to reconsider the conceptual separation between body and digital platform in order to fully imagine the possibilities of black trans-masculine existence.

Future Directions

The understandings interlocutors provided are invaluable; however, their vitality will only be strengthened through continued conversations with black transmasculine individuals. This iteration of my work focused primarily on Tumblr, which helped me learn a lot about how these dynamics take shape within this particular context. Within that context, I learned of the numerous productive aspects of Tumblr. But I also left this project understanding that Tumblr can serve as a vector of violence against marginalized

communities. The affordances interlocutors utilize to find community, build networks, and express themselves are also utilized by transphobes, misogynists, and white nationalists to create communities grounded in violence against others.

For instance, there is no way to block individuals from accessing a hashtag. Someone who dislikes trans people and wishes to comment hateful things on posts can easily search #blacktransmen and find individuals to harass. Therefore, the tags interlocutors use to conduct dysphoria work, move through moments of violence, and establish mutual recognition are also the avenues through which violence can be levied against them. This dual function of hashtags – both productive and corruptible – serves as a reminder of the complexities of Tumblr. As a site, it is neither inherently positive or negative. Its malleable nature and its ties to capitalist aims of profit inspires me to consider other sites when continuing this work.

In the future, I intend to engage with a broader range of websites, including Facebook, Twitter, and Decolonizing Fitness. Facebook and Twitter, unlike Tumblr, are mainstream sites with larger user bases. The affordances of these sites are different, and because of their larger user bases, they are deployed in different ways. I am curious to know how this difference impacts BDTE and interlocutors' lives. Decolonizingfitness.com, started by Illya Parker who identifies as black and transmasculine, is a compelling site for future exploration because it focuses on producing fitness materials for all bodies. Parker's work emphasizes the importance of exercise for all individuals, and he customizes workouts with transmen in mind. Examining his site would allow me to further understand how literal black trans bodies are being co-produced by the digital. Overall, adding more digital ethnographic field sites

will allow me to more accurately understand the relationship between the digital and material. I predict that the line between online and offline is even more blurred than I articulated in this project, and that the strategies enacted by black transmasculine people are more nuanced and complicated than presented here.

In addition, this iteration of the project consisted of a very limited sample size. In the future, I intend to increase the number of interlocutors, as well as the locations I visit. This expansion will ensure more diversity of educational backgrounds, geographic locations, and ages. In particular, expanding the age range of interlocutors will undoubtedly nuance my theorizations of black trans-masculinity. Finally, I intend to continue conversations on the impact of misogynoir on interlocutors' lives and larger formulations of black trans masculinity, as well as present the concept of radical kindness. Radical kindness, or the deliberate execution of kindness, was repeatedly discussed by interlocutors as a tool of dysphoria work. For instance, interlocutors would note giving women physical space in public so as to not make them feel afraid. Interlocutors note these acts come from remembering what it was like to be read and treated as girls and women in society. While I gained important knowledge about radical kindness during the research process, further discussion with more interlocutors is needed to fully flesh out how this concept works. I look forward to discussing it and other aspects of black masculinity in future work.

These expanded efforts will continue focusing on the lived realities of interlocutors and further exploring such questions as: What are the lived experiences, both positive and negative, of black transmen in the U.S. today? How are their lives impacted by the current socio-political atmosphere? What are their tools of surviving and

thriving? Even with this project's existing limitations, my collective interactions with interlocutors ignited a deep reflection on reimagined possibilities of masculine embodiment. Overall, I started this project to further understand the nuances of interlocutors' masculinity. In the process, I was forced to reflect honestly on my own behaviors and practices. Often, masculinity and manhood are essentialized as violence, making it is easy to fall into nihilistic despair. Considering that four women a day are killed by masculine partners in the United States, this nihilism seems warranted (Snyder 2019). However, interlocutors' insights about ways of being that combat dominant ideals of manhood serve as reminders and suggestions we can all use.

We must constantly strive for another way of existing, one in which our acts are deliberately rooted in an intersectional desire to change systematic oppression. It is hard for individuals to conceptualize the possibilities of creating masculine performances beyond this purpose. However, what I argue in this dissertation — and what I and the interlocutors of this project attempt to realize in our lives — is that it is possible to create a masculinity, a trans-masculinity, that does not seek to harm or control others.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, S. (2006). *Queer phenomenology: Orientations, objects, others*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Ahmed, S. (2010). "Feminist Killjoys (And Other Willful Subjects)". *The Scholar and Feminist Online* 8(3).
- Alexander, Bryant K. (2006). *Performing Black Masculinity: Race, Culture, and Queer Identity*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.
- Bailey, M. & Trudy (2018) On misogynoir: citation, erasure, and plagiarism, *Feminist Media Studies*, 18:4, 762-768.
- Bettcher, T. (2014). Trapped in the Wrong Theory: Rethinking Trans Oppression and Resistance. *Signs*, 39(2), 383-406.
- Black Women and Sexual Violence Fact Sheet: <https://now.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Black-Women-and-Sexual-Violence-6.pdf>
- Boyd, d. (2007) "Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life." *MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Learning – Youth, Identity, and Digital Media Volume* (ed. David Buckingham). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Bowleg, Lisa, (2012). "Once You've Blended the Cake, You Can't Take the Main Parts Back to the Ingredients": Black Gay and Bisexual Men's Experiences of Intersectionality. *Sex Roles* 66 (1&2), 1-17.
- Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing Gender*. New York, NY: Routledge
- Carr, C.L. (2005). Tomboyism or Lesbianism? Beyond Sex/Gender/Sexual Conflation. *Sex Roles* 53, 119–13.
- Casselberry, J. (2017). *The Labor of Faith: Gender and Power in Black Apostolic Pentecostalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Clark, M. (2014). "To Tweet Our Own Cause: A Mixed-Methods Study of the Online Phenomenon "Black Twitter." Diss. University of North Carolina.
- Craig, T., & Lacroix, J. (2011). Tomboy as protective identity. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 15(4), 450-465.

- Cromwell, J. (1999). *Transmen and FTMs: Identities, Bodies, Genders, and Sexualities*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Denzin, N. K. (1997). *Interpretive ethnography: Ethnography practices for the 21st century*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Devor, A.H. (1999). *FTM: Female-to-male Transsexuals in Society*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Dolezal, Luna. (2015). *Body and Shame*. Lexington Books.
- Donohue, B. (2009). Pulitzer Prize-winning author Junot Diaz tells students his story. NJ.com. https://www.nj.com/ledgerlive/2009/10/junot_diazs_new_jersey.html
- Donovan, R. A. (2007). "To blame or not to blame: Influences of target race and observer sex on rape blame attribution." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 22, 722-736.
- Duggan, L. (2002). *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Ekins, R., and D. King. (2008). *The Transgender Phenomenon*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Farman, J. (2012). *Mobile Interface Theory Embodied Space and Locative Media*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.
- Ferguson, R. (2007). Introduction: Queer of Color Critique, Historical Materialism, and Canonical Sociology. In Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Feinberg, L. (1992). *Transgender liberation: A movement whose time has come*. World View Forum.
- Foucault, M. (1988). "Technologies of the Self." *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, edited by Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton. London, England: Tavistock Publications.
- Fox, J. and Bailenson, J. (2009). "Virtual Self-modeling: The Effects of Vicarious Reinforcement and identification on Exercise Behaviors." *Media Psychology* 12(1): 1-25.
- Gardner, & Hughey, Sheena, Matthew Kaori W. (2014). Good Hair in Race and Racism in the United States: An Encyclopedia of the American Mosaic edited by Charles Gallagher and Cameron D. Lippard (Volume 1: A – E, p. 485).
- Halberstam, J. (1998). *Female Masculinity*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Haraway, D. (2004). *The Haraway reader*. New York ; London: Routledge.
- Hausman, B. (1995). *Changing sex: Transsexualism, technology, and the idea of gender*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Hess, A. (2015). The Selfie Assemblage. *International Journal Of Communication*, 9, 1629-1646.
- Hill, D. (2014). *Transgressngroove: An Exploration of Black Girlhood, The Body, and Education*. Diss. University of Illinois.
- hooks, b. (1996). *Bone Black : Memories of girlhood* (1st ed.). New York: Henry Holt.
- Jackson, S. J., & Foucault Welles, B. (2015). Hijacking #myNYPD: Social media dissent and networked counterpublics. *Journal of Communication*, 65, 932–952.
- Johnson, E P. *No Tea, No Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies*. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Kristeva, J. (1982). *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lodder, M. (2009). A Somatechnological Paradigm: How do you Make Yourself a Body without Organs? 187-206.
- Lettow, S. (2011). Somatechnologies: Rethinking the body in the philosophy of technology. 15. 110-117.
- Mask-Jackson, F. (1991). "Black Children and Their Churches." Dissertation. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- May, V. (2015). *Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Murray, S. and N. Sullivan, eds. (2012). *Somatechnics: Queering the technologisation of bodies*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing.
- Nagel, J. (2003). *Race, ethnicity, and sexuality intimate intersections, forbidden frontiers*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Neal, M. A. (2013). *Looking for Leroy: Illegible Black Masculinities*. New York: New York University Press.

- Nicholson, N. (2014). "Tumblr Femme: Performances of Queer Femininity and Identity." *Carolina Communication Annually*, 30, 66-80.
- Noble, B. (2011). *My Own Set Of Keys': Meditations on Transgender, Scholarship, Belonging*. Feminist Studies Vol 2, 254-269.
- Owens, T.C., et. al. (2017). Towards an Interdisciplinary Field of Black Girlhood Studies. *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research*, Vol 6, 116-132.
- Prosser, J. (1998). *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Pugliese, J. and S. Stryker. (2009). "The somatechnics of race and whiteness." *Social Semiotics*, 19 (1): 1-8.
- Rauschnabel, P., Sheldon, P., & Herzfeldt, E. (2019). What motivates users to hashtag on social media? *Psychology & Marketing*, 36(5), 473-488.
- Reevy, G., Ozer, Yvette Malamud, & Ito, Yuri. (2010). *Encyclopedia of emotion*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: Greenwood.
- Richardson, M. (2013). *The Queer Limit of Black Memory Black Lesbian Literature and Irresolution*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press.
- Richardson, M., and Page, E. (2010). "On the Fear of Small Numbers: A 21st Century Prolegomenon of the U.S. Black Transgender Experience." In *Black Sexualities: Probing Powers, Passions, Practices, and Policies*. Eds. Juan Battle and Sandra L. Barnes. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Richardson, Riché. (2007). *Black Masculinity and the US South: From Uncle Tom to Gangsta*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Rubin, H. (2003). *Self-made men: Identity and embodiment among transsexual men*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press
- Salamon, G. (2010). *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Senft, T. M., & Baym, N. K. (2015). What does the selfie say? Investigating a global phenomenon. *International Journal of Communication*, 9, 1588-1606.
- Serano, J. (2007). *Whipping girl : A transsexual woman on sexism and the scapegoating of femininity*. Emeryville, CA: Seal Press.

- Shapiro, E. (2010). *Gender Circuits: Bodies and Identities in a Technological Age*. 1st ed.
- Snorton, C. (2009). "A New Hope": The Psychic Life of Passing. *Hypatia*, 24(3), 77-92.
- Snorton, C. (2017). *Black on both sides : A racial history of trans identity*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press
- Snow, D., & Anderson, L. (1987). Identity work among the homeless: The verbal construction and avowal of personal identities. *American Journal of Sociology*, 92(May 87), 1336-1371.
- Spade, D. (2010). "Resisting Medicine/Remodeling Gender."
- Spillers, H. (1987). "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics*, 17, (2), 64-81.
- Stryker, Susan. (1998). "The Transgender Issue: An Introduction." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies* 4.2(145-59).
- Stryker, S. (2008). *Transgender History*. (Seal Studies).
- Sycamore, M., ed. (2006). *Nobody Passes: Rejecting the Rules of Gender and Conformity*. Emeryville, CA: Seal Press.
- University of Connecticut 2019 Fact Sheet:
<https://uconn.edu/content/uploads/2019/03/INS-004-Fact-Sheet-New-013019-FY19.pdf>
- Wang, R., Liu, W., & Gao, S. (2016). Hashtags and information virality in networked social movement: Examining hashtag co-occurrence patterns. *Online Information Review*, 40, 850–866.
- Weheliye, A. (2014). *Habeas viscus racializing assemblages, biopolitics, and black feminist theories of the human*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Young, I. (1980). Throwing like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality. *Human Studies*, 3(2), 137-156.