

Beyond the “Wrong Body” Narrative: Trans Masculine Embodiment and
Disidentification Through Autobiography, Sex, and Play in James
Diamond’s *Jizz Envy* (2014) and Skyler Braeden Fox’s *Hello Titty* (2015)

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Abstract

Beyond the “Wrong Body” Narrative: Trans Masculine Embodiment and Disidentification Through Autobiography, Sex, and Play in James Diamond’s *Jizz Envy* (2014) and Skyler Braeden Fox’s *Hello Titty* (2015)

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This thesis examines the experimental film and video art by two Canadian moving image artists: James Diamond’s video *Jizz Envy* (2014) and Skyler Braeden Fox’s short film *Hello Titty* (2015). It argues that these works create spaces that enable a recategorization and rethinking of trans embodiment as part of a larger gender spectrum of possibilities than those offered in the current diagnostic definition of trans identity practiced in the medical field and propagated in society at large. It presents how by centering transmasculine sexuality, these artworks disrupt the logic of dysphoria at the heart of diagnostic discourse which assumes that trans individuals are incapable of pre-operative sexual intimacy. The thesis critiques the current model of diagnosis focused on dysphoria and the concept of the wrong body. Using José Esteban Muñoz’s theory of disidentification, it presents how these works weave between different conceptualizations of embodiment that can be simultaneously aligned with diagnosis and contradictory to its implied structure of trans identity. Finally, through discussion on BDSM practices, sex, and play within the works, it concludes that Diamond and Fox’s works explore and expose the antagonistic relationship between dysphoria and trans embodiment that each artist experiences, simultaneously upholding the concept of the wrong body and critiquing it.

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“The fragmentation, segmentation, multiplicity of the category trans* can only emerge within the optic that recognizes trans* as a capacious and fluid category rather than a diagnosis.”

– Jack Halberstam, *Trans*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*

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Introduction

This thesis examines the experimental film and video art by two Canadian moving image artists: James Diamond's video *Jizz Envy* (2014) and Skyler Braeden Fox's short film *Hello Titty* (2015). It argues these works create spaces that enable a recategorization and rethinking of trans embodiment as part of a larger gender spectrum of possibilities than those offered in the current diagnostic definition of trans identity practiced in the medical field and propagated in society in general. Medical determination through diagnosis of whether or not a patient is trans affects how one gains access to medical transition and care as a trans person. By centering transmasculine sexuality as the main subject, these artworks disrupt the logic of dysphoria at the heart of diagnostic discourse which assumes that trans individuals are incapable of pre-operative sexual intimacy. The thesis begins with a critique of the current model of diagnosis focused on dysphoria and the concept of the wrong body through an introduction of Diamond's and Fox's works. The critique then turns to the ways in which trans people have a disidentificatory relationship to diagnosis, weaving between different conceptualizations of embodiment that can be simultaneously aligned with diagnosis and contradictory to its implied structure of trans identity. Finally, the thesis provides a critical analysis of the works, elaborating on how they offer other ways of conceptualising trans embodiment through an in-depth discussion on BDSM practices, sex, and play within the works. It concludes that Diamond's and Fox's works explore and expose the antagonistic relationship between dysphoria and trans embodiment that the artists experience, simultaneously upholding the concept of the wrong body and critiquing it.

As queer and trans history scholar Susan Stryker underscores, transgender history is not only that of the formation of an identity and community but the history of sexology, medical

science, technology, and social debate on gender and sexuality.¹ Much like its history, the terms used to relate to trans identity (for example, transsexual, transgender, and trans) are complex and ever changing. Each term variation is formed within a specific time and place and contains its own histories, meanings, and communities. The terms speak to a gender identity that is not parallel with one's assigned sex (or, non-cisgender identity). However, this incoherence to assigned gender and the identity that forms also varies within each term.

In light of this incoherence, philosophy scholar Benjamin Singer has coined the term “trans-generative excess” to refer to the categorical excess inherent in the concept of trans. According to Singer, this excess is inherent to its umbrella function, which gathers and holds all non-normative gender identities together.² Singer acknowledges the aggregate functions of these terms and sees the potential of unity and community they give; however, he argues that as a term, transgender holds within it an ever-expansive and sometimes varying and conflicting conceptualisation of trans embodiment.³

Like Singer, I take as a premise within this thesis that our medical understanding and diagnostic practices and language itself are ill-equipped to handle the multiplicity of possible identities.⁴ For the purpose of this study, I alternate between using the terms transsexual, transgender and trans, and transmasculine to reflect their historical or theoretical use by others or when a term appears as a direct quote or citation of source used. Wherever possible, I will change the term used by scholars and artists within my own discussion of their work, while at the same time respecting, and being mindful to reflect, their self-identifications. When speaking

¹ Susan Stryker, *Transgender History, Second Edition: The Roots of Today's Revolution* (Da Capo Press, 2017), 31–58.

² Benjamin Singer, “From the Medical Gaze to Sublime Mutations: The Ethics of (Re)Viewing Non-Normative Body Images,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 616, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203955055-56>.

³ Singer, 616.

⁴ Benjamin Singer, “Towards a Transgender Sublime: The Politics of Excess in Trans-Specific Cultural Production” (Rutgers University - Graduate School - New Brunswick, 2011), 2, <https://doi.org/10.7282/T31R6PK5>.

more broadly about the community, I will use the terms “trans” and “transmasculine people.” I use “trans” to include all those who do not identify as cisgender, and “transmasculine” to include all those assigned female at birth who are masculine identified.

According to Singer, only by thinking about trans embodiment beyond its diagnostic realities will we be able to begin accounting for the fragmentation, segmentation and multiplicity inherent within the term “trans.”⁵ Unlike diagnostic logic, this framework requires recognizing varying forms of embodiment as valid – there is no right or wrong way to be trans but rather trans people sit along a continuum in which they “dream themselves into the world and remake the world in the process.”⁶

Before elaborating on the analytical framework, I will first provide a brief introduction to the two works under discussion. Berlin-based Ontario-born social worker, filmmaker, and musician Skyler Braeden Fox’s fictional narrative, *Hello Titty* (2014, 16 min., sound, colour) is a homage to the artist’s tits before their real-life removal. The film is about mastectomy, commonly referred to as top surgery within the trans community, the process of having one’s breasts surgically removed often with the reshaping of chest and nipples to resemble a cisgender male’s chest. *Hello Titty* begins with a voice-over monologue by Fox on his relationship to his breasts, his decision to have them removed and the place of this film in his personal journey. It then switches to the fictional narrative in which the artist plays a character named Tit Star Showboy who is giving his fans one last opportunity to say goodbye to his breasts (figure 1). Fox (b. 1981) is a self-proclaimed “emotional exhibitionist,” whose work is both revealing, provocative and deeply personal.⁷ Fox identifies with trans masculinity but rejects the title and

⁵ Singer, 146.

⁶ Jack Halberstam, *Trans*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*, American Studies Now: Critical Histories of the Present 3 (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018), 44.

⁷ “Skyler Braeden Fox,” Vtape, accessed December 19, 2018, <http://www.vtape.org/artist?ai=1823>; Skyler Braeden Fox, Interview by Jay Bossé, Phone call, November 14, 2018.

identity of “man.”⁸ Working as a social worker by day and filmmaker by night, his work has been screened internationally at both queer film and porn film festivals. ⁹ *Hello Titty*, which was Fox’s first short film, received an honorable mention at Good For Her’s Annual Feminist Porn Awards in 2015.¹⁰ His second film, a thirty-minute long docu-porn film *The 36 Year-Old Virgin* (2017), is about sex and the concept of virginity from the perspective of queer folks and their lived experiences.¹¹ Interviews on the subjects of sex, penetration, and virginity are juxtaposed with Fox’s own narrative of what led him to have penetrative sex with a cisgender man for the first time. Exploring desire, sex, and self, this deeply personal film unpacks the politics of penetration, re-contextualizing virginity in relation to queer and trans bodies and sexuality. As will be shown in the following sections, these themes were explored by Fox in *Hello Titty* produced three years previously, and to date remain the focus of the artist’s explorations.

The action of *Hello Titty* takes place in two different spaces: outside and inside of Showboy’s trailer (figures 2 and 3). The exterior scenes of the trailer were in fact the artist’s home at the time located in a queer communal trailer park in Berlin.¹² In outlandish futuristic and highly stylized hair and costuming, Showboy’s queer fans have been lining up outside of the trailer, waiting their turn to see him. An impatient Dominatrix and her human dog walk up from the back of the line to the Butleress where she strikes a deal to gain entry ahead of the others. Upon entering, she instructs Showboy to remove his shirt; she starts by playing with his breasts but becomes increasingly rough with them (figure 4 and 5). Noticing from a window the

⁸ BraedenBraeden Fox, Interview by Jay Bossé.

⁹ Fox also performs as a musician under the name Peanut Envy, and his work in film and in music focuses on queer and trans sexuality.; “Skyler Braeden Fox,” PinkLabel.tv, accessed December 19, 2018, <https://www.pinklabel.tv/on-demand/studio/skyler-braeden-fox/>; R.M. Vaughan, “Skyler Braeden Fox Throws His Breasts a Goodbye Party,” *Canadian Art*, September 14, 2015, <https://canadianart.ca/features/skyler-braeden-fox-throws-his-breasts-a-goodbye-party/>; Braeden Fox, Interview by Jay Bossé.

¹⁰ “Skyler Braeden Fox.”

¹¹ Skyler BraedenBraeden Fox, *The 36 Year-Old Virgin* (Pink Label TV, 2017), <https://www.pinklabel.tv/on-demand/film/36-year-old-virgin/>.

¹² Braeden Fox, Interview by Jay Bossé.

altercation heating up in the trailer, the Butleress grabs a shy young man from the lineup and throws him into the trailer (figure 6). Upon the young man's intrusion, the Dominatrix commands Showboy to fuck him with his breasts, which excites the dog who joins in (figure 7). The scene concludes with the Dominatrix lactating on the pack of queer boys and the Butleress joining in to get their end of the bargain – the dog – after directing those still waiting outside to leave (figures 8 and 9). The end of the film depicts Showboy and the Butleress caressing each other to the song *Transition* by Peanut Envy, Fox's musical alter ego (figure 10).

Montreal-based experimental and multidisciplinary artist Diamond's video work *Jizz Envy* (2014, 2 min., sound, colour), also autobiographical, walks us through the artist's first experience of his own vaginal ejaculation: squirting. Working primarily in painting and moving image, Diamond (b. 1977) self-describes as Jewish, white, Anglophone, disabled (unable to work), and as a “transman who is gay, bisexual, straight and transamorous.”¹³ His moving image works investigate the relationship between trans embodiment, his own trans narrative, poverty, and mental illness.¹⁴ Diamond is currently working with one of his partners on a project that imagines a “reverse society where trans is the norm and a trans couple is super natural. We will rule our own story. Cis weirdos will feed us grapes.”¹⁵

Diamond's *Jizz Envy* was filmed on his iPad and has a DIY aesthetic (figure 11). The title presents the locus of the work's creation, “jizz” being a colloquialism for ejaculate, the male-

¹³ Transamorous: Person who is sexually attracted to trans people. “BIO,” James Diamond, accessed December 19, 2018, <http://www.jamesleediamond.com/bio/>; James Diamond, email message to author, November 30, 2018.

¹⁴ Diamond has made several moving image works but is more widely known for *Man from Venus* (1999) and *Mars Womb Man* (2006), the latter winning Best Experimental Work at imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival in 2006 and screened internationally for over a decade.¹⁴ In 2012 at the age of 35, Diamond presented his first film retrospective at Toronto's Rhubarb Performance Arts Festival.; Anthea Black, *No Place : Queer Geographies on Screen* (London, Ont.: Western McIntosh Gallery, 2014), <https://e-artexte.ca/id/eprint/24884/>; “The Rhubarb Archive,” Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, accessed December 19, 2018, <http://buddiesinbadtimes.com/about/history/the-rhubarb-archive/>.

¹⁵Diamond, email message to author.

associated bodily function the artist is envious of. The narrative is driven by the song lyrics composed and performed for the film which refer to Diamond's relationship to his body, sexuality, and desire to ejaculate, and describe him as "a man who is extra queer. He had even been assigned female at birth" (figure 12).¹⁶ They recount, in intimate detail, his meeting with then-partner Tasha Zamudio and the development of their love and sex life, including in the final sequence how one day she penetrated him and "It drove him wild and all of a sudden, he felt something stir in his loins [...] to his surprise, flooded her bed with a soaking wet prize."¹⁷ In the last scene, Zamudio is standing by an outdoor fountain smiling while the video slowly zooms in on the jet of water (figure 13). This humorous and celebratory work compels us to rethink the meaning of ejaculation and proposes a less gendered understanding of sexual climax.

Methodology

This thesis focuses on experimental film and video works by two trans artists, however, there are numerous examples of trans or gender variant artists whose work engage in similar discussions using a wide range of creative mediums.¹⁸ Diamond and Fox are also not the only to have centered the transmasculine body or experience. The 1990s saw the penultimate photographic work of transmasculine artists Del LaGrace Volcano and Loren Rex Cameron which pushed the transmasculine body into art historical and scholarly discourse. My objective in this study is to activate existing and current scholarly research to analyze Diamond's and Fox's works and hence contribute to the ways in which histories of moving image artworks can be a fruitful way to understand the complexity of trans embodiment.

¹⁶ See Appendix for full redaction of lyrics from *Jizz Envy*.; James Diamond, *Jizz Envy* (Vtape, 2014).

¹⁷ Diamond.

¹⁸ Examples include the photographic work of Wynne Neilly and JJ Levine, the performance work of Kris Grey and Cassils, and the documentary film works of Jules Roskam and Rémy Huberdeau, to name only a few.

Little scholarly investigation has been made into the representation of transmasculine identities, bodies, and sexualities in moving image art works. Therefore, to investigate how the two artworks offer a different way of understanding transmasculine bodies and subjectivity, the research for this thesis has been necessarily and purposely interdisciplinary and draws from queer theory and trans studies within various fields including art history, cultural studies, cinema studies, pornography studies, psychology, and philosophy. While sources in art history are scarce, scholarship exists regarding other forms of expression, notably in photography, cinema and pornography studies. For example, there has been extensive writing on transmasculine people as subject and object in photography, such as the foundational work of Del LaGrace Volcano and Loren Rex Cameron.¹⁹ As explained by Jay Prosser in the foreword of Volcano's photography book *Sublime Mutations*, the artist's series *FTM and TransGenital Landscapes* capture the ways transsexual men physically differ from cisgender men, without costing the masculinity or questioning the identity of the subjects presented.²⁰ As Bobby Noble notes, there is a relative vacuum of representation of the transmasculine body nude, with the exception of the photographic work of Volcano and Cameron.²¹ Cameron's work uses the aesthetic strategy of the beautiful as a tool to present the transmasculine body.²² In film, the Hollywood portrayal of the life and murder of Brandon Teena in the film *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) directed by Kimberly

¹⁹ Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, Sexual Cultures (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Jay Prosser, "The Art of Ph/Autography: Del LaGrace Volcano," in *Sublime Mutations* (Tübingen, Germany: Konkursbuch Verlag, 2001), 6–11; Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1998); Jamison Green, *Becoming a Visible Man* (Vanderbilt University Press, 2004); Eliza Steinbock, "Generative Negatives: Del LaGrace Volcano's Herm Body Photographs," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (November 1, 2014): 539–51, <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2815228>.

²⁰ Prosser, "The Art of Ph/Autography: Del LaGrace Volcano," 7.

²¹ Bobby Noble, "The 'P' Word: Trans Men, Stone Butches and the Politics of Penetration," *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice* 31, no. 2 (September 9, 2007): 16; Bobby Noble, "Knowing Dick: Penetration and the Pleasures of Feminist Porn's Trans Men," in *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure*, ed. Tristan Taormino, Constance Penley, and Celine Parrenas Shimizu (New York, NY: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2013), 141–42.

²² Singer, "From the Medical Gaze to Sublime Mutations," 614.

Peirce has garnered extensive academic study, most notably in the work by queer and trans theorist Jack Halberstam.²³

Other fields that deal with trans masculinity and sexuality include documentary and docu-porn genre studies particularly through the scholarship of Bobby Noble.²⁴ In various articles, Noble explores the docu-porn genre, the mixing of interviews and pornographic scenes, and its use by various transmasculine people to explore trans identity and sexuality.²⁵ Pornography has also been a vast medium of representation and a place of scholarly intrigue about trans masculinity, especially as it relates to sexuality.²⁶ Pornography studies have been a particularly significant launching point to understanding the role of sex in these artworks.

In addition to contextualizing these works within critical trans political discourse, I conducted in-depth interviews with both artists and have tried as much as possible to incorporate their own reflections and interpretations in my discussion of their works. Diamond's interview was conducted by writing, per his request. While Fox's interview was through web chat, which gave us the opportunity to have a more open format discussion. I also maintained

²³ Jack Halberstam, "The Transgender Gaze in Boys Don't Cry," *Screen* 42, no. 3 (September 2001): 294–98; Jack Halberstam, "The Body in Question: Transgender Images in Contemporary Visual Art," *MAKE Magazine*, no. 88 (August 6, 2000): 37–38; Halberstam, *Trans**; Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*.

²⁴ Noble, "Knowing Dick: Penetration and the Pleasures of Feminist Porn's Trans Men"; Noble, "The 'P' Word."

²⁵ Morty Diamond, *Trans Entities: The Nasty Love of Papi and Wil*, 2007, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3283430/>; Buck Angel and Elayne Angel, *Sexing the Transman* (Buck Angel Entertainment, 2012); Luke Woodward, *Enough Man* (Frameline, 2005); Donna Rowell et al., *Butch Mystique*, videorecording (MOYO Entertainment, 2003).

²⁶ Finn Jackson Ballard, "Transcendental Gazes: Pornographic Images of Transmasculinity," in *Sensational Pleasures in Cinema, Literature and Visual Culture: The Phallic Eye*, ed. Gilad Padva and Nurit Buchweitz (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014), 91–103, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137363640_7; Marcel Barriault, "Bucking Heteronormativity: Buck Angel as Porn Performer, Producer and Pedagogue," *Porn Studies* 3, no. 2 (April 2, 2016): 133–46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2016.1184476>; Elijah Adiv Edelman, "The Cum Shot: Trans Men and Visual Economies of Ejaculation," *Porn Studies* 2, no. 2–3 (July 3, 2015): 150–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2015.1056632>; Elijah Adiv Edelman and Lal Zimman, "Boycunts and Bonus Holes: Trans Men's Bodies, Neoliberalism, and the Sexual Productivity of Genitals," *Journal of Homosexuality* 61, no. 5 (May 4, 2014): 673–90, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2014.870438>; Andrew McBride, "Transmen in Porn: Alternative Masculinities and Dilemmas of Visibility" (University of Michigan, 2008); Courtney Trouble, "Finding Gender through Porn Performance," *Porn Studies* 1, no. 1–2 (January 2, 2014): 197–200, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2014.888254>.

communications with Diamond and Fox while I wrote the thesis. My questions for both artists were centered around identity, sexuality and the intentions behind their works.

This thesis is also a critical response to Emma Rose and Stephen Lonsdale's 2016 article, "Hidden Identities and Concealed Dangers: Visual Art, Transgender Health, and Wellbeing," which centred on the wrong body narrative and medical discourse as a means of interpreting the work of trans artists Cassils and Yishay Garbasz.²⁷ Its central argument is that the process of transition conceals health risks specific to trans people and that art can bring some experiences to light to reveal these hidden dangers. In doing so, the text glosses over other possible ways trans people conceive their embodiment and how art can be a means of vocalizing these other ways of being. Without unpacking the deeply flawed system of diagnosis, the concept of passing, and the complex history of trans medical care, the study basically could not consider the ways in which the health care system acts as a gate keeper that keeps trans people from living as they see fit in their own bodies. Their limited reading of the artworks, interpreted solely based on the very constrictive view of the medical diagnostic understanding of trans embodiment, ultimately stripped agency from the artists discussed and failed to engage with the complexity of trans embodiment. In contrast, I seek to study and avoid the same mistakes by engaging precisely with the history and power structures crystallised in medical discourse around trans embodiment and how artists engage, critique, and create beyond this discourse.

In her influential 1992 book, *The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto*, media theorist and artist Sandy Stone advocates that we must never forget the most important word, "some," in discussions of any identity, and particularly minority subjectivity in order to avoid homogenizing or totalizing what are diverse identities and experiences.²⁸ In ignoring

²⁷ Emma Rose and Stephen Lonsdale, "Hidden Identities and Concealed Dangers: Visual Art, Transgender Health, and Wellbeing," *International Journal of the Image* 7, no. 1 (March 2016): 1–12.

²⁸ Sandy Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 10, no. 2 (May 1, 1992): 167, <https://doi.org/10.1215/02705346-10-2-29-150>.

specificity of the lived individual experience, we lose the potential of encountering the true potential of the term “trans.” To speak about a smaller section of the community or even an individual does not keep us from understanding structures or patterns as a whole, but rather the use of specificity permits us to make more poignant critiques that have larger implications.

To allow trans people to self-identify with the term “trans” or any of its peripherals is to de-empower diagnosis and the medical institution and give that power to the trans individuals involved. In response to Stone’s call for a multi-authored understanding of trans identity, Talia Mae Bettcher argues that we must accept first-person authority in the process of identification of trans people. Bettcher argues that the dismantling of our current gate keeping system, that which decided who is permitted the identity of trans, is the only way to account for the subjective nature inherent to trans identities.²⁹

In agreement with Bettchers’ I take the same positions on the importance of self-definition. I do not seek nor have the authority to attribute a title of authenticity to the identities of the artists. Rather, I use the artists’ first-person authority on their own identity as a vantage point to present multiplicity within the term “trans.” By choosing to study art by two transmasculine artists with variant identities, I seek to present a small part of the multiplicity that can be found within this small sub-category of trans identity. I also acknowledge my subjectivity within the research presented. My perspective as a transmasculine person, my conceptualization of identity, experiences of marginality, and struggle for a place within the coercive diagnostic system, have undeniably influenced my interpretation of the trans works discussed. Rather than shying away from this fact and trying to claim objectivity, I recognize and use my embodied

²⁹ Talia Mae Bettcher, “Trans Identities and First-Person Authority,” in *“You’ve Changed”: Sex Reassignment and Personal Identity*, ed. Laurie Shrage, Studies in Feminist Philosophy (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 98–120.

experiences as a methodology.³⁰ As part of this work I interviewed both artists separately as a means of putting their identities and work as central to the research over my own subjectivity. By facilitating the artists to speak on their own behalf, in conversation with me for this study, I hope that I have done justice to them, their identities, and their artistic work.

Outline of Sections

This thesis has three main sections. Section One integrates the history of trans medicalizing and taxonomy within a preliminary analysis of the works, focusing on dysphoria and the notion of the wrong body. Section Two takes queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz's work on disidentification to examine *Hello Titty* and *Jizz Envy* as autobiographical works entangled in (or, at least are grappling with) the disidentificatory relationship to diagnostic discourse and its implied logic of gender transition as the seeking of passing as cisgender. The third and final section critically analyzes the works as disidentification in relation to the de-sexualization of transmasculine people, followed by a discussion of sex and play as presenting other ways of conceptualizing trans identity. I conclude that by centering sex and play in their explorations, Fox and Diamond's works present others way of understanding transmasculine embodiment beyond the notion of the wrong body.

³⁰ Susan Stryker, "(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies," in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 1–18.

SECTION ONE

Dysphoria, Authenticity and the Wrong Body

In her book *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*, Anne Fausto-Sterling takes a biopolitical approach to present how culture, power, and social morality have mapped out the current understanding of the sexes and gender by extension. Fausto-Sterling presents the parallels between new medical technologies and the naming, locating and creation of deviant bodies.³¹ She argues that with the invention of new technologies, medical science of the nineteenth century was able to “locate,” categorize, and ultimately create these deviant bodies and correct them.³² Science has thus managed non-cisgender individuals through various namings, theories, and diagnoses for a long time. Although the term cisgender is thought to have originated in the work of German sexologist Volkmar Sigusch in his printed work of 1995 and 1998, all medical formulations of trans identity have historically functioned as a process of emulating cisgender identity on the part of the trans individual.³³ With this in mind, this section provides an overview of the history of the taxonomy, defining, and the medicalization of trans people up until the present-day diagnostic criteria. This will be done alongside a close reading of Fox’s and Diamond’s moving image works and their critical engagement with this history of medical discourse, particularly in relation to critiques of the “wrong body” notion, the concept of authenticity in relation to trans identity, and implications for access to care. I then discuss how both works present a complex relationship to the concept of dysphoria, which is the defining medical characteristic of trans identity.

³¹ Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2000), 37.

³² While her work focuses primarily on intersex people, she spends a large portion of the book discussing the medical histories and management of transsexual and transgender individuals.; Fausto-Sterling, 37.

³³ Volkmar Sigusch, “[Transsexual wish and and cis-sexual defense],” *Psyche* 49, no. 9–10 (October 1995): 811–37; Volkmar Sigusch, “The Neosexual Revolution,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 27, no. 4 (August 1, 1998): 331–59, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1018715525493>.

The Early History of Trans Medicalization

While it is largely accepted that non-cisgender identities have existed across time and cultures, the nineteenth century saw the emergence of the field of sexology which was formed around the study and classification of sexual “abnormality”.³⁴ By the twentieth century, sexology had reconceptualised the cultural understanding of sex and gender, in large part due to the growing discourse on transsexuality.³⁵ However, as astutely noted by Stone, “As with men theorizing about women from the beginning of time, theorists of gender have seen transsexuals as possessing something less than agency.”³⁶ In fact, the historic formulation of gender has up until recently left out the perspective of trans people as well as their input on their own identities.

According to Susan Stryker, the theories, concepts, diagnoses and terms that come to constitute the trans community began with the work *Psychopathia Sexualis*, first printed in 1886 by Richard von Krafft-Ebing in which he presents the first theories on non-normative sexual behaviour.³⁷ His theories were later taken up by early twentieth-century scholars who presented variations on the same theme with different names.³⁸ In 1910, doctor Magnus Hirschfield wrote *The Transvestites*, the first book-length investigation into the phenomena of what we would now call trans identities. Hirschfield’s research and publication of the book and basically the creation of the concept of the transvestite, coincided with the discovery of

³⁴ Jay Prosser, “Transsexuals and the Transsexologists: Inversion and the Emergence of Transsexual Subjectivity,” in *Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires*, ed. Lucy Bland and Laura L. Doan (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 116.

³⁵ Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (United States of America: Harvard University Press, 2004), 6.

³⁶ Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back,” 163.

³⁷ Stryker, *Transgender History, Second Edition*, 45–48.

³⁸ The most notable are Havelock Ellis’s term “inversions” in 1913 and Magnus Hirschfield’s “transvestite” in 1910. Stryker, 45–48.; While inversion has been largely used to discuss the formation of homosexuality as an identity, Prosser argues that “Sexual inversion “referred to a broad range of deviant gender behavior, of which homosexual desire was only a logical but indistinct aspect...” Prosser, “Transsexuals and the Transsexologists: Inversion and the Emergence of Transsexual Subjectivity,” 116.

testosterone and estrogen by his friend and colleague Eugen Steinach. Soon after, Hirschfield and other doctors were prescribing hormones as part of treatment for trans people.³⁹ It is contested if transsexuality should be conceived as a product of technology that “created” the transsexual through medical intervention, or as the social capacity to recognize the existence of non-cisgender identification.⁴⁰ What is evident is how the creation of the transsexual within medical science coincided with the establishment of treatment. This development made both the assigning of identity and treatment of an individual something that was managed by others rather than self-fulfilled by trans people, which the power structure still at work today.

In the 1960s The Stanford clinic was the first academic clinic that specialized in transsexual care. In the search for standardization, clinicians turned to the narratives presented in *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (1966) by Harry Benjamin, to create the image of what a transsexual was and construct the first diagnoses of transsexuality.⁴¹ It took several years for clinicians to realize why candidates so closely fit Benjamin’s description of transsexuals; many of candidates had read Benjamin’s book as it was passed around within the community and were performing what clinicians thought to be transsexual identity.⁴² This parroting of diagnostic criteria is still present in today’s trans clinical/medical systems.⁴³

In 1968, the Stanford clinic began a program managed by a staff of surgeons and psychologists to collect as much information about transsexualism, including asking patients at the clinic. Stone’s summary of those findings presents how the concept of “wrong body” emerged alongside clinical discourse.⁴⁴ Further elaboration on the clinical procedure is required

³⁹ Stryker, *Transgender History, Second Edition*, 39; Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 5.

⁴⁰ Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 37; Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 5.

⁴¹ Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back,” 161; Harry Benjamin, *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (New York, N.Y.: Julian Press, 1966).

⁴² Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back,” 161.

⁴³ Will Rowe, “Auditioning for Care: Transsexual Men in Ontario Accessing Health Care” (McMaster University, 2009).

⁴⁴ Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back,” 152.

to fully grasp the power structures that were being enacted in order to arrive at the Stanford clinic's formulation of diagnosis based on "discovering" "abnormal" "sexual" behaviour – a direction which began with cisgender male practitioners in the burgeoning field of sexology. Abnormality is first decided on the part of the clinician informed by his experience, subjectivity, and cultural upbringing. These abnormalities are then categorised, thus forming the transsexual. Once this term is in circulation and a basis of access to medical care, trans people are then consulted on how they view themselves, often by the same practitioners who administered medical access and care. Thus, once trans people are finally consulted on how they see themselves, it is within an institution that is already in place that has a vested interest in the formulation of the identity and diagnosis they have already created and that is used to decide who gets medical care.

If one's access is held hostage by an institution, one would be inclined to not contradict the structure already in place. Based on this course of history and the fact that it is widely known that trans people echoed diagnosis, I would argue then that for some, thinking of oneself as being in the "wrong body" is a reformulation of pre-existing concepts of transsexuality and a process of self-legitimization rather than a true reflection of self-understanding. To be sure, for some this concept best reflects a sense of self. However, I am not convinced that the only way trans people saw and see themselves is as an image of unsuccessful cisgender embodiment, which is at the heart of the concept of the wrong body. I argue that from the beginning of medical diagnosis, trans people have been on the outside of the act of defining what trans identities are. Diagnosis was created as a means of standardization and legitimization of the identity-assigning process by healthcare professionals who sought an objective clinically appropriate test.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Stone, 160.

Gender Dysphoria, Diagnosis, and the Wrong Body in *Hello Titty* and *Jizz Envy*

First introduced in the work of Dr. Norman Fisk in the 1970s as a means of opening up the narrow definition of transsexualism, gender dysphoria is the larger concept under which trans identity is understood and diagnosed.⁴⁶ As Jemma Tosh states in their book *Psychology and Gender Dysphoria: Feminist and Transgender Perspectives* (2016), gender dysphoria has come to mean abnormal distress.⁴⁷ Gender dysphoria is attributed to someone who is experiencing distress resulting from incongruence between gender identity and assigned gender (based on sex).⁴⁸ The adoption of gender dysphoria as a condition by the primary source book for mental health care, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*, in its fifth edition in 2013, opened up who could access care.⁴⁹ However, while dysphoria functions to create more space for a diversity of identities, it is still derived from the wrong body narrative.⁵⁰

Hello Titty and *Jizz Envy* present a complex relationship to dysphoria, the notion of the wrong body, and their implications to trans identity and embodiment. To help shape and inform my analysis of these works, I draw on scholarship that critique the wrong body argument, specifically Ulrica Engdahl's article "Wrong Body" in *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly and Postposttranssexual* and Paddy McQueen's article "Enslaved by One's Body? Gender, Citizenship and the 'Wrong Body' Narrative," from the *Journal of Citizenship Studies*.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Jemma Tosh, *Psychology and Gender Dysphoria: Feminist and Transgender Perspectives* (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 55.

⁴⁷ Tosh, 55.

⁴⁸ Titia F. Beek, Peggy T. Cohen-Kettenis, and Baudewijntje P.C. Kreukels, "Gender Incongruence/Gender Dysphoria and Its Classification History," *International Review of Psychiatry* 28, no. 1 (February 2016): 5, <https://doi.org/10.3109/09540261.2015.1091293>.

⁴⁹ Roger K. Blashfield et al., "The Cycle of Classification: DSM-I Through DSM-5," *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology* 10, no. 1 (March 28, 2014): 25–51, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-032813-153639>.

⁵⁰ "Gender Dysphoria - DSM-5," in *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 0 vols., DSM Library (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596.dsm14>.

⁵¹ Paddy McQueen, "Enslaved by One's Body? Gender, Citizenship and the 'Wrong Body' Narrative," *Citizenship Studies* 18, no. 5 (August 2014): 533–48.

The wrong body narrative has come under criticism in varying intersections of feminist, queer, and trans political discourse and theoretical/academic communities as being a “wrong theory” as Bettcher argues.⁵² Wrong body as a short hand of “being in the wrong body” is not just simply a metaphor, rather it is the very foundation of trans diagnostic logic.⁵³ The adoption of dysphoria is a requirement in order for trans individuals to obtain diagnosis and treatment centered around medical interventions to the body. Thus, the critique of the wrong body narrative must start with the idea of being in the body, rather than being of the body, in order to interrogate what “wrong” means in relation to the body. As Bettcher explains in her aptly titled article “Trapped in the Wrong Theory,” the wrong body model has two versions.⁵⁴ Briefly, the first version assumes a medical condition of transsexualism from birth that, through genital reconstruction surgery, is assigned the title of woman or a man. The second version is that the individual is and always has been either a man or a woman based on their identity and that the body should be changed to reflect this inner true self. Both models use a sense of authenticity, permanence, and incongruence to conceptualise trans identity.⁵⁵

Authenticity, however, as the primary question at the heart of the wrong body, McQueen argues is a fallacy.⁵⁶ Within the concept of wrong body, the assumed wrong is on the part of the body in relation to the true, real and authentic gender identity. This makes both the body and the self as static, while positing them in opposition to each other.⁵⁷ Within this dichotomy, the self is seen as the point of truth and unwavering, and growth or change on the part of gender identity is

⁵² Ulrica Engdahl, “Wrong Body,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1–2 (May 1, 2014): 267, <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2400226>.

⁵³ Engdahl, “Wrong Body.”

⁵⁴ Talia Mae Bettcher, “Trapped in the Wrong Theory: Rethinking Trans Oppression and Resistance,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 39, no. 2 (January 1, 2014): 383, <https://doi.org/10.1086/673088>.

⁵⁵ Bettcher, 383.

⁵⁶ Paddy McQueen, “Authenticity, Intersubjectivity and the Ethics of Changing Sex,” *Journal of Gender Studies* 25, no. 5 (September 2, 2016): 557–70, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2015.1063991>.

⁵⁷ Engdahl, “Wrong Body,” 267.

disallowed.⁵⁸ This is despite how, as recent scholars have argued, change, growth, and evolution are integral parts of identifying as trans.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the centering of identity as authentic has been one of the founding ways trans people have been able to gain access to bodily-altering technologies.⁶⁰ Rather than reflecting trans embodied experiences, this dominant system normalizes cisgender temporality which requires gender identity to be fixed through time and without change to claim legitimacy. Hence authenticity of gender identity can only be claimed on the part of the trans individual if they mirror the fixed, unchanging gender identity and biological sex temporality inherent to cisgender identity.

Authenticity presumes that one is and has always been a certain gender and that medical intervention is a corrective measure to obtain an inner truth.⁶¹ “To right the wrong” in this circumstance means for the body to be altered to create congruence between physical body and gender identity, to replicate cisgender embodiment. In doing so the diagnosis of dysphoria and by extension trans identity, and medical intervention come with the underlying purpose to no longer be trans, that is, it is assumed that one seeks to pass as cisgender as the goal of transition.⁶² However, what happens when one rejects getting the “right” body, or, in diagnostic terms, “incongruent”?

This is one of the primary questions put forth in Diamond’s work. Within *Jizz Envy*, Diamond’s dysphoria in relation to his presumed incapability of ejaculation is expressed in the lyric “However, one aspect of his cock that was hard to swallow was that it didn’t ejaculate.”⁶³ These lyrics inform us to the nature of Diamond’s dysphoria and align him

⁵⁸ McQueen, “Authenticity, Intersubjectivity and the Ethics of Changing Sex,” 557.

⁵⁹ See Jack Halberstam, *Trans*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*, for a summary of various other conceptualizations, especially the work of Lucas Crawford and Jasbir Puar.

⁶⁰ McQueen, “Authenticity, Intersubjectivity and the Ethics of Changing Sex,” 558.

⁶¹ McQueen, 557.

⁶² Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back,” 165–68.

⁶³ Diamond, *Jizz Envy*.

somewhat with the diagnostic understanding of being trans. However, he also rejects part of the logic of transition that this diagnosis assumes, by means of the bodily relief of this dysphoria through a capacity his body already had.⁶⁴ This brings us to the question, how is the trans pre-operative body wrong when the body relieves the dysphoria that defines the subject as trans? As astutely stated by Diamond in the work, his dysphoria is not one that can be medically treated. Neither hormone replacement therapy nor phalloplasty have the capacity to make Diamond ejaculate.⁶⁵ However, those forms of intervention are not needed because his body, more specifically his own (born with) genitals, relieve his dysphoria. By identifying with and being envious of the presumed masculine act of ejaculation, Diamond replicates the notion of trans envy of cisgender embodiment at the heart of the notion of the wrong body. However, the relief of this dysphoria through his own bodily capacity is a disidentificatory act. Seemingly contradictory, these identificatory processes suggest a nuanced relationship to dysphoria, diagnosis, and the presumed logic of medical transition that is supposed to replicate cisgender embodiment as treatment for gender dysphoria.

The presence of Fox's breasts in *Hello Titty* has a similar effect. While their eventual removal aligns him with the trajectory of transmasculine medical transition, the monologue that opens the film underscores the non-linear path this decision took (figure 1.) By virtue of making this film, Fox invites the audience to rethink why his breasts are wrong. They are presented with love, compassion and eroticism, by virtue of being the central element and muse of the film.⁶⁶ His breasts are not considered to be outside of his identity or in opposition to it but rather, even with their eventual removal, as part of him. This is made very clear within the opening

⁶⁴ "No surgery no hormones would ever change the fact that how jazzing felt he could only speculate." Diamond.

⁶⁵ Phalloplasty is the surgical construction of a penis for transmasculine people. Often referred to as bottom surgery within the trans community.

⁶⁶ The initial desire to make the film was as an homage to Fox's breasts in light of his upcoming surgery.; Braeden Fox, Interview by Jay Bossé.

monologue where he states, “One of the most important things I learned during the process was that my tits, for better or for worse, are a part of me, and they always will be in one way or another.”⁶⁷ The presence of sex characteristics commonly perceived as female leads us to rethink their culturally-constituted meaning when presented alongside masculine identity. This as well disrupts the notion of wrong body.

After providing a brief outline of the history and current formulation of diagnosis of trans people within Western medical institutions, with its emulation and normalization of cisgender embodiment, I have in this section argued that *Hello Titty* by Fox and *Jizz Envy* by Diamond each negotiate in their own way the complex and diverse conditions of embodiment within the term dysphoria that is related to the diagnostic and culturally-formed understanding of trans identity as being in the “wrong body.” Within both works the audience is compelled to question what makes the bodies in these art works wrong in relation to the masculine identity of their creators. Ultimately, the artists throw out the concept of wrong body, while simultaneously rejecting the “right” one, taking a third space that centers on the concept of “my body” as a way to understand trans embodiment more broadly than that offered by the notion of gender dysphoria.

In the next section, I draw on the work of queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz to interpret the works as having “disidentificatory” relationship in which the artists align with, yet negotiate self in the shadow of, dysphoria and diagnosis.

⁶⁷ Skyler Braeden Fox, *Hello Titty* (Pink Label.TV, 2015).

SECTION TWO

Disidentification: Making Self in the Shadow of Diagnosis

Using José Esteban Muñoz's theory of disidentification, this section examines how the artists navigate through their trans autobiographical works, their self-definition in relation to medical discourse, and its permutation into the concept of the wrong body. I argue that trans autobiography as a form of disidentificatory practice – which I describe as the process of naming oneself as trans through the act of autobiography – dismantles the assumed trajectory of transition.

Similar to how the idea of homosexuality -- as an inborn, stable trait -- did not emerge until the end of the nineteenth century, the transsexual did not fully emerge as a special type of person until the 1950s.⁶⁸ Winning the right to surgical and legal sex changes, however, exacted a price: the reinforcement of a two-gender system.⁶⁹ In the case of transmasculine subjects, those who seek medical transition must identify with diagnosis in order to access medical services. However, the power structures of medical apparatuses and cis-normative dominant culture is precisely that which diagnosis upholds. To seek medical intervention to the body, one must thus in part, or at least in a performative fashion, declare their allegiance to this system and relate to the definition of trans identity laid out within diagnosis. The stand-in concept of the “wrong body” crystallises our current medical definition of trans identity which presents a legitimizing and normalizing of cisgender identity, forcing it as an object of emulation for trans people which in turn creates a dynamic of erasure of other possible gendered embodiments. In contrast, the following discussion of the artworks suggest that some transmasculine subjects also define themselves partly outside of this system.

⁶⁸ Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 107.

⁶⁹ Fausto-Sterling, 107.

Disidentification

In his 1999 book *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, the late José Esteban Muñoz defines the minoritarian survival technique of disidentification as “...survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship.”⁷⁰ Muñoz focuses on queers of colour who use disidentification as a tool of survival in a heteronormative, white supremacist and misogynistic world.⁷¹ Expanding on this framework, this thesis repurposes the notion of disidentification as a means to understand the complex and fraught relationship that some transmasculine subjects have to the diagnostic understanding of trans identity – a relationship that is always present in *Jizz Envy* and *Hello Titty*.

The central push of Muñoz’s notion of disidentification is the acknowledgement that minority subjects work with and resist the indoctrination nature and erasure tendencies of the dominant culture. It is not, however, the picking and choosing from dominant culture to create an object for one to identify with, rather it is the recycling, rewriting, remaking of that dominant script to use its exciting power and imbue it with new life through an alternate meaning or usage as a project of self-creation.⁷² To identify with this dominant ideology is to assimilate oneself into their encoded power structures and to reject it which validates the system by “reinforcing its dominance through the controlled symmetry of “counterdetermination.”⁷³ Therefore, disidentification presents an alternate place of relationality, a place of critique that centralizes

⁷⁰ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, Cultural Studies of the Americas, v. 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 4.

⁷¹ Muñoz, 5.

⁷² Muñoz, 12, 23, 49.

⁷³ Muñoz, 11.

one's subjectivity and creates a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology through a reformulation of its elements and meanings.

Muñoz's book presents various examples of queers of colour navigating dominant discourse through disidentification. Of particular relevance to this thesis is his discussion of the homeless transgender Latina Sara/Ricardo, a character from the documentary film *The Salt Mines* (1990) directed by Susana Aiken and Carlos Aparicio. Muñoz argues that the film, in centralizing poverty, drug use, and disease, is an antidote to the glamorization of the Black and Latino transsexual community presented in Jennie Livingston's film *Paris Is Burning* (1991).⁷⁴ Aiken and Aparicio's follow-up film *The Transformation* (1996) begins with a letter by Sara who now goes by Ricardo (birth name) who has renounced his trans and homosexual (as male desire for male) identity and taken up a heterosexual life as part of a conversion to born-again Christianity. According to Muñoz's reading of *The Transformation*, Ricardo needed the safety and comfort provided by the church and his "conversion" was necessary as living on the street with AIDS was putting his health at risk. Muñoz argues that Ricardo worked within the ideology of this Christian group, thus obtaining the safety and comfort it provided without wholly giving into its discourse of conversion. This is most evident at the end of the film when his born-again identity ultimately falters, illustrating the disidentificatory relationship underpinning this conversion narrative. Within this example, Muñoz presents how disidentification can have material realities beyond solely that of cultural reformulation and identity.⁷⁵

In addition to disidentification as a survival strategy, this example underscores how material survival is at times dependent on disidentification. In the case of transmasculine people, disidentification enables one to navigate and access health care while simultaneously being able

⁷⁴ Muñoz, 162.

⁷⁵ Muñoz, 162–64.

construct and maintain a self-hood or sense of self beyond the criteria that names one as trans and permits access. This is not simply a theoretical hypothesis. As Will Rowe states, the performance for health care is a survival strategy actively used by many transmasculine people.⁷⁶ This performance, I argue, is a disidentificatory act. Pushing the relationship between self-definition and diagnosis for transmasculine people one step further, I propose that in naming oneself as trans we not only inevitably align ourselves with its diagnostic definition but also articulate a sense of self that would contradict or push the boundaries of diagnosis, in other words, this self-articulation is an act of disidentification. The following discusses ways in which the very act of calling oneself into being as a trans subject, in the form of trans autobiography, is both an act of disidentification and posttranssexualism. The latter term coming from the work of Sandy Stone, refers to process of inhabiting one's trans identity and speaking from a subject position that acknowledges and embraces its experience of "transness".⁷⁷

Trans Autobiography as Disidentificatory Practice

Some scholars have observed that trans, or more specifically sex-change autobiographies have come to constitute a literary genre of their own. Historically the genre focused primarily on the before-after dichotomy and the physical, medical transition itself.⁷⁸ In more recent works, the political takes on a larger role, with more in-depth examination and questioning of the binary

⁷⁶ Rowe, "Auditioning for Care: Transsexual Men in Ontario Accessing Health Care."

⁷⁷ Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back."

⁷⁸ For an extensive list of transmasculine autobiographies see Matthew Heinz, *Entering Transmasculinity: The Inevitability of Discourse* (Intellect Books, 2016), 79–80; Pagan Kennedy, *The First Man-Made Man: The Story of Two Sex Changes, One Love Affair, and a Twentieth-Century Medical Revolution* (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2008), 140; The first ever trans feminine text of the genre was Lily Elbe's 1933 novel *Man into Woman: An Authentic Record of a Change of Sex*. In 1997 Mario Martino (also known as Angelo Tornabene) published *Emergence*, the first full-length autobiographic work by a transmasculine individual. Brett Genny Beemyn, "Autobiography, Transsexual," 114, accessed October 9, 2018, http://www.glbtcarchive.com/literature/autobio_transsexual_L.pdf; Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back," 156; Stryker, *Transgender History, Second Edition*, 114.

gender system rather than simply a telling of the shifting from one end to the other.⁷⁹ As Tobias Raun writes, this autobiographic legacy has shifted to a digital format with many trans YouTube creators chronicling and discussing their transition.⁸⁰

Generally, autobiography is understood as a literary genre, one that presents one's own account of one's life.⁸¹ However, as Raun points out, trans autobiography can take many forms and still retain its initial function, short comings and purpose. The history of transsexual biographies and autobiographies is a case in point; the genre was influenced and formed by external factors, not just lived experiences. According to Jay Prosser, many transsexual autobiographies repeat an archetypal story structure which reflects diagnostic understanding of transsexuality.⁸² He argues that this is because the subject needs to return to clinical definitions in order to recognize themselves as truly transsexual, meaning that identity is not something embodied and experienced within the genre of transsexual autobiography, but something created and performed.⁸³ For Raun, the autobiographical act is a foundational element to trans identity; one must speak from a place of self/subjectivity in order to be diagnosed and recognized as trans within the medical institution and society more broadly.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ This is exemplified in Leslie Feinberg's semi-autobiographical novel *Stone Butch Blues* (1993) and Kate Bornstein's collection of personal essays and performance works including the book *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us* (1994); Beemyn, "Autobiography, Transsexual," 3.

⁸⁰ Tobias Raun's work around digital culture and trans self-representation on Youtube demonstrates this urge to self-chronical, share and self-represent. As well as the role of emerging technologies in identity formation. ; Tobias Raun, "DIY Therapy: Exploring Affective Self-Representations in Trans Video Blogs on YouTube," in *Digital Cultures and the Politics of Emotion: Feelings, Affect and Technological Change*, ed. Athina Karatzogianni and Adi Kuntsman (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Raun; Tobias Raun, "Archiving the Wonders of Testosterone via YouTube," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (2015): 701–9; Tobias Raun, "Video Blogging as a Vehicle of Transformation: Exploring the Intersection between Trans Identity and Information Technology," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 18, no. 3 (May 2015): 365–78; Tobias Raun, *Out Online: Trans Self-Representation and Community Building on YouTube* (Routledge, 2016); Cael M. Keegan and Tobias Raun, "Nothing to Hide: Selfies, Sex, and the Visibility Dilemma in Trans Male Online Culture," in *Sex in the Digital Age*, ed. Paul G. Nixon and Isabel K. Düsterhöft (London, New York: Routledge, 2018), 89–100.

⁸¹ Gabriele Griffin, "Autobiography," in *A Dictionary of Gender Studies* (Oxford University Press, July 20, 2017), <http://0-www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191834837.001.0001/acref-9780191834837-e-21>.

⁸² Prosser, *Second Skins*, 101, 105.

⁸³ Prosser, 102–9.

⁸⁴ Raun, "Video Blogging as a Vehicle of Transformation," 371.

The function of literary genre of trans autobiography is twofold: the first is as a process of self-legitimization through autobiographical storytelling, and the second is as a tool of expression of self to a wider public to instil understanding in the hope of gaining greater acceptance.⁸⁵ As Stone argues, this historically formulaic understanding of self that reflects the diagnostic understanding of trans embodiment supports theories that keep trans people from engaging in authentic modes of self-representation.⁸⁶ However, Stone also acutely points out that to speak outside of this mode is to speak as a non-transsexual or failed transsexual within the eyes of diagnosis, leading her to ask the poignant question “How, then, can the trans-sexual speak?”⁸⁷

Within the medical system the presumed goal of transition is to pass as cisgender, thus to no longer be trans. To re-write one’s history into a plausible history (cisgender normative time) is denying trans identity and performing it, in the eyes of medical discourse, correctly at the same time. If, as argued by Stone, transsexuality is an identity based on the erasure of one’s difference, that is, to seek passing at all costs, then any act that outs the transsexual subject, is performing transsexuality incorrectly and thus removes one from the classification of transsexual person. Stone argues that the construction of “plausible histories” is the reconstruction of one’s biography to adhere to cisgender normative temporality, is one of the ways trans people assume a cisgender identity.⁸⁸ For trans people, however, our histories do not follow this logic or temporality, rather we question this linear logic precisely because of the nature of trans identities. Stone describes this position trans people hold, having had multiple gendered subjectivities, as filled with “intertextual possibilities” – or what I propose to more accurately refer to as “gender

⁸⁵ Prosser, *Second Skins*, 117.

⁸⁶ Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back,” 164.

⁸⁷ Stone, 164.

⁸⁸ Stone, 165.

complex histories.”⁸⁹ The erasure and replacement of gender complex histories with plausible histories “forecloses the possibility of a life grounded in the intertextual possibilities of the transsexual body.”⁹⁰

Stone provides an antidote of sorts to this loop with the concept of the posttranssexual. Posttranssexualism is a way of understanding trans identity and embodiment which seeks to be read and acknowledged as trans and to thrive in that liminal space, rather than denying it. It is not just the act of not passing but rather a state of being and creating that acknowledges one’s gender complex history.⁹¹ Cisgender time is one where gender identity is consistent throughout ones past and into the future. Posttranssexualism then is the acknowledgement of fluidity in one’s gender history. That is to recognize that one’s assigned gender or even past identities do not adhere to current or even possible future identities.

While Stone proposes posttranssexualism as a way for transsexuals to navigate medical discourse and diagnosis, I believe that trans people of any identity variation can be affected by the same dependency on medical systems and by extension, diagnosis. If we understand trans identity to be dependent on diagnosis and if the central function of diagnosis and treatment is passing as cisgender, then the point of treatment of trans people is to no longer actively occupy a transitional space. As Stone states: “The more successful you are, the less transsexual you become.”⁹²

Autobiography by trans people is thus an example of inhabiting posttranssexualism, as well as being an act disidentification. Through the process of confessional inherent to the autobiographic process, one calls into attention one’s gender complex history. One inhabits a

⁸⁹ Stone, 165–68.

⁹⁰ Stone, 166.

⁹¹ In an afterword to the text Stone acknowledges this process at work in transgender theory (authors words) and academia, which we would now call the field of trans studies; Stone, 165–68.

⁹² Stephen Whittle, “Impossible People: Viewing the Self-Portraits of Transsexual Persons,” in *Sexuality*, ed. Amelia Jones, Documents of Contemporary Art (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1988), 200.

posttranssexual state in which the form of autobiography adheres to and questions the systems, theories, and assumptions that underline diagnostic practices. Here I turn to discuss how *Hello Titty* and *Jizz Envy* are not just works of self-portraiture but also works of autobiography that do the work of unravelling diagnosis through a posttranssexual subjectivity.

A self-portrait is usually defined by the visual presence (often alone) of the artist within the work. *Hello Titty* and *Jizz Envy* are thus self-portraiture as both artists appear in their respective works. What is of interest here is how, as autobiographical works, they seem to express a disidentificatory relationship to the concept of passing inherent to trans diagnostic discourse. The trans body has a tenuous relationship with its own history; in fact, any work that takes on one's trans body as subject and acknowledges its gender complex history is inherently autobiographical.⁹³ While all bodies are marked and named according to their own baggage and narratives, no trans-identifiable body is capable of being removed from its marked deviation from cisgender normative time; they are incapable of accessing a biographic-less / biographic-lesser neutrality.⁹⁴ Autobiography as a self-referential practice often flattens time bringing together both a past, current and potential future self.

Hello Titty is a case in point. As a work of auto-fiction, it calls attention not only to Fox's/ Titt Star Boy's masculine breasts but also to their removal which in turn brings attention to both his gender complex history and his existence outside of cisgender time. In doing so the work is not only a presentation of Fox at that time (pre-surgery) but also speaks to both a past and future (of his upcoming surgery and future body it brings) outside of the image represented, giving it autobiographical context. This is of course exemplified through the opening monologue stating the works function within his transition. (figure 1.)

⁹³ Jules Roskam, "Making Trans Cinema: A Roundtable Discussion with Felix Endara, Reina Gossett, Chase Joynt, Jess Mac, and Madsen Minax," *Somatechnics* 8, no. 1 (March 1, 2018): 22, <https://doi.org/10.3366/soma.2018.0234>.

⁹⁴ Here I'm thinking of how scars from the removal of breast as part of transition, a scar only ever seen as invasive surgery for breast cancer outside of its trans context, marks the masculine individual as trans.

Within *Jizz Envy*, the images are somewhat disconnected in its representation from the lyrics that accompany them. Within the images themselves there are no marked signifiers that present Diamond's trans status, however, the lyrics from the start speak to Diamond's gender complex history and continues to map out his current relationship with his body that exists out of cisgender time and logic.⁹⁵ While both are strongly informed by lived experience and contain real-life narrative, it is the imbedded elements of existence outside of cisgender time logic, through the presenting of a gender complex history that is inherent to trans embodied existence that's positions these works as both self-portraiture and autobiographical.

In this section, I sought to present the complex history that trans autobiography has in relation to diagnosis and the title of trans it attributes. As Prosser states, most trans autobiographies take on a narrative structure that mirrors diagnosis and thus legitimises it.⁹⁶ The nature of writing about one's gender complex history, to take on a position of posttranssexuality as argued by Stone, is to somewhat fail at being trans. As the diagnostic validation of trans identity is given only to those who emulate cisgender embodiment and temporality, any form of trans autobiography that fully embraces one's gender complex is inherently optional to the standards set by the diagnostic system. Within *Hello Titty* and *Jizz Envy*, autobiography and gender complex history are presented in different ways by both artists but ultimately come to function in similar ways in taking on a posttranssexual positionality.

⁹⁵“He had even been assigned female at birth.”; Diamond, *Jizz Envy*.

⁹⁶ Prosser, *Second Skins*, 102–9.

SECTION THREE

Trans Embodiment in Sex Spaces: Other Ways of Seeing and Being

The process of self-defining in contradiction or, more accurately, in relation to medical discourse is not new but rather part of the very foundations of trans communities who, amidst other sex/gender minorities, gathered with those they saw as kin and developed their own vernacular and definitions of identity, as well as of trans embodiment.⁹⁷ In addition to the earlier history of transsexuality studies outlined in Sections One and Two, the mid-1990s saw the emergence of the field of trans studies and the beginning of trans academic thought on trans identity and embodiment, exemplified in the work of Sandy Stone, Leslie Feinberg and Kate Bornstein.⁹⁸ The decade also saw the emergence of the term “transgender” which came to hold beneath it various trans and gender non-conforming identities.⁹⁹ With this term there was a proliferation of thought on forms of embodiment that were “beyond the binary” and critics of the ways in which medical discourse erased trans difference.¹⁰⁰ The “beyond the binary” model exemplified in the term transgender opens up the possibilities of embodiments and identities beyond man and women. By recognising gender, as a variance of degrees in the performance of masculinity and femininity, as something fluid, it creates space for gender identities that do not uphold the gender binary.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 7.

⁹⁸ Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back”; Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come* (New York, NY: World View Forum, 1992); Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us* (Psychology Press, 1994); Bettcher, “Trapped in the Wrong Theory,” 383–84.

⁹⁹ Bettcher, “Trapped in the Wrong Theory,” 383–84.

¹⁰⁰ Bettcher, 384.

¹⁰¹ Such as non-binary, genderqueer, gender fluid, agender, among others; Engdahl, “Wrong Body,” 269.; See Chapter 2 Making Trans* Bodies in Halberstam’s book *Trans** for an extensive list and explanations of various theories on trans embodiment.

As proposed in Section One and Two, *Hello Titty* and *Jizz Envy* explore how one might oscillate between seeing a sense of self in diagnostic understanding of trans embodiment and the notion of the wrong body while also being in contradiction with or imagine a self beyond its limits. This third and final section continues my critical analysis of Fox's and Diamond's works through a discussion of the ways in which the centering of sex and sexuality, particularly in relation to BDSM and play, as primary themes in both works is also a disidentificatory stance that enables and embraces other ways understand trans embodiment. I argue the works invites their viewers to rethink the gendered politics of penetration through suspended disbelief, imagination, and acceptance of contradiction, creating an opening to let trans bodies be understood and thrive beyond the binary.

Sex as Trans Disidentificatory Practice

The taking up of sex and sexuality as subject in these works brings into account a disidentificatory relationship to the diagnostic assumption that trans pre-operative bodies are inherently non-sexual. As discussed in the previous sections, the notion of dysphoria de-sexualizes the pre-operative trans body. To be sexually active as a pre-operative trans person is to somewhat reject the diagnostic definition of trans. In contrast, the erotic capacity of the trans body within both works deploys sex and sexuality as a disidentificatory tool, enabling further possibilities for trans embodiment in sex spaces.

According to Kristen Schilt and Elroy Windsor, sex and sexuality can change how transmasculine individuals view and embody their gender identities and therefore change how they view and pursue physical/medical transition.¹⁰² This, however, is in opposition to how

¹⁰² Kristen Schilt and Elroy Windsor, "The Sexual Habitus of Transgender Men: Negotiating Sexuality Through Gender," *Journal of Homosexuality* 61, no. 5 (May 4, 2014): 737, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2014.870444>.

current medical/psychological criteria map out trans embodiment and by extension trans sexuality. If one seeks transition because the body in which they have is unfit for who they are and if this discomfort is supposedly primarily located in the genitals, then one should not and cannot derive sexual pleasure from one's sex organs. Thus, to be trans is to simultaneously reject one's in-born body and the sexual pleasures it may provide before medical intervention.

However, as Schilt and Windsor show, not only can trans people be sexually active prior to medical intervention but such pleasure may lead to understanding one's sense of trans identity differently. This is best exemplified in their finding that “[d]espite stereotypes and assumptions that trans men who do not pursue genital surgery must feel incomplete as men, our data demonstrate that trans men's diverse identities and embodiments often resist or even refute these perceptions and characterizations.”¹⁰³ If transmasculine people are finding ways to be happy outside the emulation of cisgender male embodiment why is this not reflected in our diagnostic understanding of trans identity?

Benjamin's *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (1966) deeply informed the medical understanding of trans embodiment. The book's lack of discussion of the erotic and sexual lives of its test subjects largely contributed to the desexualization of transsexuality in medical discourse.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, the wrong body narrative, dysphoria and diagnosis are constructed to force trans people to identify with and emulate cisgender embodiment, so what possibility exists for sexual satisfaction that does not emulate these types of bodies? In fact, as Zowie Davy and Eliza Steinbock argue, the possibility of trans sexual pleasure and embodiment forces a re-

¹⁰³ Schilt and Windsor, 745.

¹⁰⁴ This is exemplified through Stone's discussion of the lack of pleasure from penile masturbation on the part of transsexual women.; Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back,” 161; Zowie Davy and Eliza Steinbock, “‘Sexing Up’ Bodily Aesthetics: Notes towards Theorizing Trans Sexuality,” in *Sexualities: Past Reflections, Future Directions* (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2012), 272, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137002785_15.

conceptualisation of heterosexual and homosexual binaries of sexuality centralised around genitals.¹⁰⁵

According to Davy and Steinbock, desire within the trans subject is often thought to be located in the bodily transition and the erotic potential of “completing” transition, located in completion of genital surgery.¹⁰⁶ Writing on the transmasculine subject, sexuality, pornography and sex economy, Edelman and Zimman argue that dysphoria in part has come to be defined as the “trans subject’s rejection of or disassociation from their (surgically unmodified) genitals.”¹⁰⁷ While the scholars acknowledge that for some this is true, their chapter outlines the various ways transmasculine people conceptualise their genitals in erotic pleasure and sexuality.¹⁰⁸ Theorizing images of trans eroticism, Steinbock describes the various ways trans sexuality is managed and coded through clinical intervention as follows:

If you find any element of your pre-transition embodiment sexually arousing or even enjoyable, then you might not actually desire the full range of treatments for genital reconstruction and thus not be a true transsexual. If you masturbate or have sex while “cross-dressed,” then you could be a transvestite instead. Or, if your gender identity is the same as potential partners' and transitioning would produce gay or lesbian sexual identity then the clinician might argue that the desire to transition comes from sexual identity confusion.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Davy and Steinbock, “‘Sexing Up’ Bodily Aesthetics,” 273.

¹⁰⁶ Part of this article looks Mirha-Soleil Ross’s work *Dysfunctional* (1997) and present how the works ask us to re-think how we conceptualize trans sexuality. In the case of trans people assigned male at birth, many doctors see true transsexuality as the rejection of penile intercourse and the longing for post-surgery vaginal heterosexual sex, remarking that the success of vaginal surgery is often marked by its capability of penetration. Only recently have we considered sensitivity of the vagina as a factor of success. Davy and Steinbock, 271–73.

¹⁰⁷ Edelman and Zimman, “Boycunts and Bonus Holes,” 674.

¹⁰⁸ Edelman and Zimman, 674–75.

¹⁰⁹ Eliza Steinbock, “Look! But Also, Touch!: Theorizing Images OfTrans Eroticism Beyond a Polotics of Visual Essentialism,” in *Porno-Graphics and Porno-Tactics: Desire, Affect and Representation in Pornography* (Brooklyn, NY: Punctum Books, 2016), 60.

These perspectives indicate the continual balancing act at the heart of pre-operative trans sexuality. They also align with the ironic historical claims of transsexual identity or, more accurately, transvestism, as based on perverse hypersexuality.¹¹⁰ Therefore, to be trans in any other way but transvestism is to be non-sexual; to be sexual as a pre-operative trans person places you within the category of transvestite and the assumed perversion and mental instability it implies. Within their medicalized and pop-cultural understanding, trans people have oscillated between hyper-sexualization and de-sexualization. This fluid and messy history has many variant elements. Certain parts of the community having faced one side of this duality more than others in the community, especially transsexual women and transsexual women of colour in their pop-cultural hyper-sexualization in pornography and the public imagination, and the complete de-sexualization of transmasculine people through medical and misogynistic discourse.¹¹¹

By taking on and presenting the erotic capacity of the pre-operative transmasculine body, both *Hello Titty* and *Jizz Envy* go through a process of disidentification with dysphoria, diagnosis, the wrong body, and the de-sexualization they cause. Both works center around the experience of dysphoria and negotiate how they relate to it as a concept through sex. In different ways, both reject the totalitarian “take it all or leave it” that dichotomous trans diagnosis sets up.

In *Hello Titty*, breasts, those of Tit Star Showboy and two other characters, are central to the narrative: two of the pairs of breasts belong to transmasculine characters: Showboy and Shy Guy. Their masculinity as characters and people is not represented in opposition or threatened by their breasts. In the case of Showboy, his breasts are central to his sexual expression throughout the film. The physical nature of the interaction with his breasts, as seen by the Dom slapping and scratching his chest and breasts presents a desire to feel them, interact with them, and derive as

¹¹⁰ Davy and Steinbock, “‘Sexing Up’ Bodily Aesthetics,” 272–73.

¹¹¹ Davy and Steinbock, 266.

much sensation from them as possible, all while under the pre-text of dysphoria and impending surgery (figure 5). Here the object of eroticism is not the future post-operative body but the current “wrong” one. In aligning himself to the trajectory and some elements of dysphoria while also sexualising his “wrong” breasts, Fox unravels the assumed unidirectional eroticism of transition. This is compounded when considering the effects surgery has to the sensation of the chest. As Fox states, “the sensations of the chest change after surgery often with the complete loss of nipple sensation. Beyond this the simple feeling of being grabbed isn’t the same due to a lack of tissue to grab onto.”¹¹² Thus, the physicality and brutality in which the Dominatrix interacts with his chest becomes even more important. Not only does it illustrate a certain level of sadomasochism within their interaction, establishing a power dynamic. It also flags for those who know, perhaps having had this surgery, that this kind of sexual play changes after surgery and once again changes the unidirectional notion of transition. It creates a longing for something that has not yet passed.

Diamond’s *Jizz Envy* engages with dysphoria in a different way. As suggested by its lyrics, the locus of the dysphoria is not the lack of a phallic but the phallic function of ejaculation, which in itself is a disidentificatory relation to dysphoria. This new iteration of dysphoria is then relived within the body, through sex rather than medical/surgical intervention. With the help of his then lover, Diamond learns how to squirt, the “female” or vaginal equivalent to ejaculation. This discovery of his pre-existing bodily capacity and reliving this dysphoria, once again takes on the theoretical power invested in this concept and adapts it. In doing so, this changes both how we understand dysphoria to function in trans embodiment and re-think the potentials for its relief outside of medical and surgical practices. *Jizz Envy* thus depicts sex as the place of trans self-discovery rather than associated with a clinical procedure.

¹¹² Braeden Fox, Interview by Jay Bossé.

BDSM Practices, Sex Spaces and Play

Brandy L. Simula defines “BDSM” as an umbrella term, with the acronym standing for bondage, discipline, dominance/submission, sadism/masochism. It encompasses a range of consensual practices/activities, desires, communities/subcultures, identities/roles and meanings that involve power exchange, pain, or both.¹¹³ The term “kink” also functions as an umbrella term to describe sexual practices not based in power play but that are still considered outside of “regular” sexual practices. Play is an inherent element of all sex practices. Within kink and BDSM play, scenes and play acting are all integral parts of the practices themselves. Within these practices, play creates openings and suspends disbelief which either create the stage of engagement or permits its unfolding. Broadly speaking, sex spaces are places of play and imagination that permit the messy and contradictory existence of trans embodiment to take place.

Play has been an integral part of understanding trans embodiment in BDSM and sex spaces, as Robin Bauer notes.¹¹⁴ This role of play is also relevant in Fox’s and Diamond’s works where BDSM and sex in general are presented as a non-procreative act centered around sensation, the body, and play. With no relative function outside of procreation, sex becomes one of the few places adults still play. Play, as seen especially in BDSM, “holds the potential to open up bodies as boundary projects to playfully cross and resettle boundaries.”¹¹⁵ Play not only shapes BDSM, it is what enables these spaces to come into being, through scenes.¹¹⁶ Scenes and

¹¹³ Brandy L. Simula, “Queer Utopias in Painful Spaces: BDSM Participants’ Interrelational Resistance to Heteronormativity and Gender Regulation,” in *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 97.

¹¹⁴ Robin Bauer, “Cybercocks and Holodicks: Renegotiating the Boundaries of Material Embodiment in Les-Bi-Trans-Queer BDSM Practices” 14, no. 2 (2018): 63.

¹¹⁵ Bauer, 68.

¹¹⁶ Simula, “Queer Utopias in Painful Spaces: BDSM Participants’ Interrelational Resistance to Heteronormativity and Gender Regulation,” 98.

play allow one to engage with, temporarily and often for erotic gratification, as well as experiment with different embodiments through performance. As Bauer notes, this play facilitates embodied experiences otherwise not accessible to certain bodies.¹¹⁷ For example, “Masculinity [can] not only be detached from what are considered anatomically male bodies in a gender binary culture, but also from male and butch identities in les-bi-trans-queer BDSM spaces.”¹¹⁸ This reconfiguration of masculinity expands beyond the sex space itself and can in fact affect one’s embodied masculinity in everyday life.¹¹⁹

The act of playing is undeniably still dependent on cultural signifiers to ground gender performance.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, as Hale points out, for sexual minority communities, “These community discourses sometimes reflect rich and subtly nuanced embodiments of gender that resist and exceed any simple categorization into female, male, woman, man, and thus into homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual.”¹²¹ Herein lies BDSM and sex play’s broader utopic possibility: its capacity to reject what is “natural” or “assumed” in favour of what is felt or desired, prompting a rethinking of what gendered possibilities are in fact possible.¹²²

Penetration and Beyond

The place of penetration in the understanding of transmasculine embodiment is complex. As observed earlier in this section, sexual gratification and enjoyment in erotic capacity of one’s

¹¹⁷ Robin Bauer, “Desiring Masculinities While Desiring to Question Masculinity? How Embodied Masculinities Are Renegotiated in Les-Bi-Trans-Queer BDSM Practices,” *Norma* 11, no. 4 (October 1, 2016): 242, <https://doi.org/10.1080/18902138.2016.1260262>.

¹¹⁸ Bauer, 242.

¹¹⁹ Bauer, 241.

¹²⁰ Jacob Hale, “Leatherdyke Boys and Their Daddies: How to Have Sex without Women or Men,” *Social Text*, no. 52/53 (1997): 225, <https://doi.org/10.2307/466741>.

¹²¹ Hale, 223.

¹²² Bauer, “Cybercocks and Holodicks: Renegotiating the Boundaries of Material Embodiment in Les-Bi-Trans-Queer BDSM Practices,” 78.

pre-operative body is inherently at odds with our diagnostic and cultural understanding of trans identity and embodiment. According to Griffin Hansbury, penetration is often assumed to be in opposition to or an attack on masculinity.¹²³ For a transmasculine person to engage in penetration and receive pleasure from penetration, especially vaginally, is seen as incompatible with ones transmasculine identity.¹²⁴

However, considering these diagnostic and cultural assumptions, for some transmasculine people their penetrability and vaginality becomes not only a point of pride but an active desirable element of their embodiment and sexuality.¹²⁵ Queerness not only permits a penetrable masculinity, it also permits a masculine vaginality, a type of embodiment Hansbury calls the “transgender edge,” a place of cross-gender bodily identification but not gender identification, where penetrability is held by queer men co-opting the vagina and thus vaginality --- in other words, the vagina, either a physical or metaphorical one, permits a masculinity that is penetrable.¹²⁶

In Diamond’s *Jizz Envy*, dysphoria is not a product of vaginality but rather is relieved by it. Audiences are obliged to acknowledge his masculinity, his vagina, and penetrability simultaneously. This part of his body is not in discordance of his masculine identity but in fact helps shape it through the act of ejaculation, squirting. In contrast, Fox’s second work *The 36 Year-Old Virgin* (2017) engages more directly with questions of penetration, queer identity and virginity (figure 14).¹²⁷ In his follow up work, *Hello Titty*, penetration takes on a slightly more

¹²³ Griffin Hansbury, “The Masculine Vaginal: Working With Queer Men’s Embodiment at the Transgender Edge,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 65, no. 6 (December 1, 2017): 1018, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003065117742409>.

¹²⁴ Noble, “The ‘P’ Word,” 18.

¹²⁵ Edelman and Zimman, “Boycunts and Bonus Holes,” 674.; This can be best observed through the company Bonus Hole Boys, a company centered around the production and sale of pornography of queer cisgender and trans men.; “[Http://Bonusholeboys.Com/Site/](http://Bonusholeboys.Com/Site/),” accessed February 23, 2019, <http://bonusholeboys.com/site/>.

¹²⁶ Hansbury, “The Masculine Vaginal,” 1009–31.

¹²⁷ Braeden Fox, *The 36 Year-Old Virgin*.

absurd and playful articulation. Here the queering of penetration is less through direct identification than through its deconstruction. With no visible penis in the scenes, the act of penetration is queered through the scene of Showboy “penetrating” Shy Guy with his breasts. The viewer is left with two choices; either they take on a sense of suspended disbelief and read this act as sex or observe it as a gesture of the absurd. This puts into question the normalization of penetration as a penile act. We are forced to rethink the meaning of not only who is penetrated but who has the capacity to penetrate. While the act itself is an absurd one, it possesses the capacity to queer assumed logic of penetration, as one that requires a penis.

Queering the Phallus

The two works also problematize the notion of phallic envy conceived as the locus of transmasculine identity, by presenting queer reconfigurations of phallic power. As observed by Noble, sex play can create room for biologically oppositional gender embodiments; within the time/space of sex, one can not only embody temporarily something one is not, but also name parts of self, things that are not culturally invested with that reading.¹²⁸ This can also be extended into playing with and at something that shouldn't be.

For transmasculine people, much like what names cisgender men, is located in the phallic or lack thereof. According to Schilt and Windsor, it is “an expectation that all men must have (and must want) a penis underlies an understanding of trans men who opt not to have genital surgery as “partially operative.”¹²⁹ This lack of completion, or assimilation, has been met in some places with legal consequence, barring trans people from accessing proper legal documentation and thus has become another apparatus of the regulation of trans embodiment.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Noble, “The ‘P’ Word,” 18.

¹²⁹ Schilt and Windsor, “The Sexual Habitus of Transgender Men,” 744.

¹³⁰ Schilt and Windsor, 745.

This notion of incompleteness is one that has haunted people with vaginas, historically women, for a long time and has been used as a premise of subjugation.

As argued by Finn Jackson Ballard in his examination transmasculine cultural production, for many transmasculine persons, masculinity is not dependent on having a penis.¹³¹ Here I would like to make clear that this does not mean that transmasculine people do not actively engage with or identify with the phallic but that this identification is not always located at the body in the ways we assume or with permanence. As Ballard points out, phallic iconography is often used consciously and playfully by transmasculine people.¹³² This play can take various forms, the most ubiquitous is that of play around strap-on dildos used by people with all kinds of different genders and sexualities.¹³³ They function to “extend the surface of the body and renegotiate its boundaries.” both physically and in the case of transmasculine people sometimes emotionally.¹³⁴ Dildos permit a temporary manifestation of masculinity through the iconography of the phallic and its assumed masculine power. For many this play exercise, this temporary state, is enough. For others, however, the phallic is embodied in less recognisable ways.

In *Hello Titty*, Fox actively sought to co-opt phallic power and represent it in through breast within the film in a couple of ways.¹³⁵ First, we are confronted with the masculine breasts of Tit Starboy. The dominatrix trope, folded into fear of power castration, comes to layer on top of Starboy’s masculinity to orient us to the phallic nature of the breasts. The second appearance of the phallic breast is in the scene of “penetration”. Starboy’s breasts not only become the center

¹³¹ Ballard, “Transcendental Gazes,” 97.

¹³² Ballard, 100.

¹³³ Hansbury, “The Masculine Vaginal,” 1011.

¹³⁴ Bauer, “Cybercocks and Holodicks: Renegotiating the Boundaries of Material Embodiment in Les-Bi-Trans-Queer BDSM Practices,” 58.

¹³⁵ Braeden Fox, Interview by Jay Bossé.

of the sexual action they become the active party in the sexual encounter. While symbolic more than anything, the penetration is a means of guiding the viewer through this reorientation of the phallic.

Starboy's breasts, however, are not the only ones imbued with phallic power. Rather than masculinity being the tool of recognition, the Dominatrix's exertion of power is through the phallic power of her breasts: she rubs her breasts throughout the sequences and teases Shy Guy before shoving them into his mouth, playing to the heterosexual pornographic trope of double penetration. Finally, this phallic power comes to end as she "ejaculates," spraying the pack of queer boys before her with breast milk, playing to the pornographic money shot.

The money shot comes as a visual representation of the ultimate phallic male power.¹³⁶ It has two intricate functions; one is the outward display of masculinist pleasure through the fetishistic and ritualised representation of ejaculation. The second is its place in the presumed absence of female ejaculation. While the existence of vaginal capacity of ejaculation (squirting) has been strongly debated, it historically does not contain the power attributed to penile/testicular ejaculation. Therefore, her ejaculatory absence (in a heterosexual cisgender dynamic) becomes embodied in his capacity to present satisfaction, not to mention the inherent sexual power dynamics inherently and humorously at play as well.¹³⁷

Through the play spaces created by the sexually charged nature of this work, Fox can present phallic breasts. Through the attribution of phallic power to both Starboy and the Dominatrix, this phallic power is not gendered either. Phallic power becomes just another element of play within the work, one which the audience gleefully participates in. In doing so, the audience not only observe this horizon of queerness we actively participate in its creation

¹³⁶ Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 93–119.

¹³⁷ Steinbock, "Look! But Also, Touch!: Theorizing Images Of Trans Eroticism Beyond a Politics of Visual Essentialism," 63.

through the act of watching. Our own reading of the bodies presented create pockets of queer possibility, which permit trans bodies to exist beyond cisgender emulation and only with very tenuous gendered contexts.

Ejaculation: Slipping Between Metaphor and Materiality

As mentioned earlier, historically ejaculation was presumed something only possible by means of testicular production of seminal fluid and its expulsion through the penis via the urethra, often named male ejaculation. It has a long-standing history of the manifestation of masculinity, virility and power. Vaginal ejaculation, often referred to as female ejaculation has been controversial both in scientific and within the community at large.¹³⁸ The act, somewhat involuntary is a bodily orgasmic reaction marked by the expulsion of a large amount of fluid.¹³⁹ It is now scientifically recognised as analogous to penile/testicular ejaculation.¹⁴⁰ However, culturally it has not been extended the same cultural significance and currency of penile/testicular ejaculation.

In *Jizz Envy*, Diamond renegotiates who and what bodies can ejaculate and forces the audience to rethink its connection to the phallus. Within this work the artist takes on the topic of squirting, or vaginal ejaculation. As signified by the title, the envy or dysphoria here is placed within the action rather than the phallus itself. Relief comes in the form of penetrative sex, which presents to Diamond his pre-existing bodily capacity. Diamond's work presents a queering of ejaculation on all fronts, ejaculation is removed from the phallic and placed as a vaginal capacity. In doing so, he divorces the ejaculatory power from the phallus, and presents his

¹³⁸ Joanna B. Korda, Sue W. Goldstein, and Frank Sommer, "Sexual Medicine History: The History of Female Ejaculation," *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* 7, no. 5 (May 1, 2010): 1965, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-6109.2010.01720.x>.

¹³⁹ Korda, Goldstein, and Sommer, 1965.

¹⁴⁰ Korda, Goldstein, and Sommer, 1973.

ejaculation as a tool of self-actualization based in masculinity rather than biological manhood. This story presented by the lyrics is playfully echoed through images of Tasha Zamudio smiling in front of a local outdoor fountain, presenting this experience as both collaborative, fun, and humorous.

Conclusion

In presenting trans embodiment without shame, these works provide us with a framework to critique the notion of the wrong body. It presents trans embodiment as connected to a sustained sex life filled with fun, humour, kink, love, compassion and eroticism. These works so aptly reflect the conclusions made by Schilt and Windsor in that “[t]hrough negotiating gendered sexuality, trans men literally reconstruct notions of the “normal trans body” and may feel less restricted to conform to identity and sexuality hegemonies due to their marginalized status.”¹⁴¹ These works not only demonstrate transmasculine people to have fulfilling, passionate, kinky sex lives they also present how this is not at odds with trans identity or pre-operative status. To have a good sex life is not to reject the body but love its difference and play with its possibilities.

In this thesis, I have argued how Fox’s work *Hello Titty* and Diamond’s work *Jizz Envy* present a disidentificatory relationship to diagnosis, dysphoria and the notion of the wrong body. By centering sex, sexuality, and play, they present to us other ways of understanding trans embodiment, beyond the wrong body. In Section One, I examined Muñoz’s theory of disidentification and its use by minoritarian subjects as a survival technique. I then demonstrated how the work of Fox and Diamond by the confessional nature of trans autobiographic work, question the implied logic of transition, as seeking to pass as cisgender. The catalyst for the creation of *Hello Titty* was Fox’s upcoming double mastectomy. As stated by Fox in our

¹⁴¹ Schilt and Windsor, “The Sexual Habitus of Transgender Men,” 745.

interview, this process often leads to one to have no or less sensation in the area. For Fox, however, the motivation for surgery is not wholly reflected in the notion of dysphoria. His decision to get surgery was not based in a sense of incongruence between his identity and body. Rather the incongruence is between his body as a trans person and the social gendered encoded meanings his body has that is in opposition to his identity. In Section Two, I briefly outlined the history of Western trans medicalization and discussed the works' disidentificatory relationship to trans diagnostic logic and its deployment of the wrong body. I considered these works as examples of how some transmasculine people negotiate this system of power and survive within it by working with, against and around the notion of dysphoria and the wrong body.

The third and final section of this thesis took on two larger issues: how the works present a disidentificatory relationship with the de-sexualization of transmasculine subject implied in diagnosis; and what is created in the wake of this process. Exploring the interplay of trans embodiment, BDSM, sex spaces and play as they unfold within the works, I investigated how the works prompt a rethinking of the gendered politics of penetration through suspension of disbelief, imagination, and accepting contradiction, and how they not only queer the concept of phallic but also offer a reinterpretation of the notion of phallic envy and co-opt ejaculation. Ultimately, I argued that the works suggest BDSM and sex spaces, through play, create an opening that furthers understanding to see transgender embodiment differently.

In the case of Fox's work, I provided a more in-depth examination of how his acceptance, indulgence and eroticism of his breast within the work, presents a means to rethink trans embodiment. In the case of Diamond's work *Jizz Envy*, the artist does not criticize the notion of dysphoria outright but rather its cause and its treatment. The work starts with Diamond presenting his discomfort within his body. His dysphoria, however, is not in the lack of a phallic, assumed within the notion of the wrong body, but rather an envy of ejaculation. I conclude by

discussing the significant role of play and sex in the process of dealing with his dysphoria and how its relief coming from the body opens a queer horizon of possibility that makes us rethink not just trans bodies but ejaculation as a human experience.

Within this thesis I have examined how trans people weave between different conceptualizations of embodiment that can be at once within and contradictory to diagnosis. In doing so I conclude, much like others have argued before me, that we need to re-conceptualize our understating of trans embodiment beyond diagnosis and the concept of wrong body. However, I add to this discussion through the centralization of sex and sexuality in my critical analysis of the two works to argue that BDSM and sex spaces can be places of trans embodiment. As play spaces, the works permit a disconnect and suspended disbelief or rejection of the binary cisgender logic of bodies and permit other forms of embodiment not possible within such a system. Ultimately, James Diamond's *Jizz Envy* and Skyler Braeden Fox's *Hello Titty* create two varying utopic spaces that permit a recategorization and rethinking of bodies that open up a far larger spectrum of possibility that is simultaneously not currently in the here and now for trans people and yet one that is beyond the wrong body.

Figures

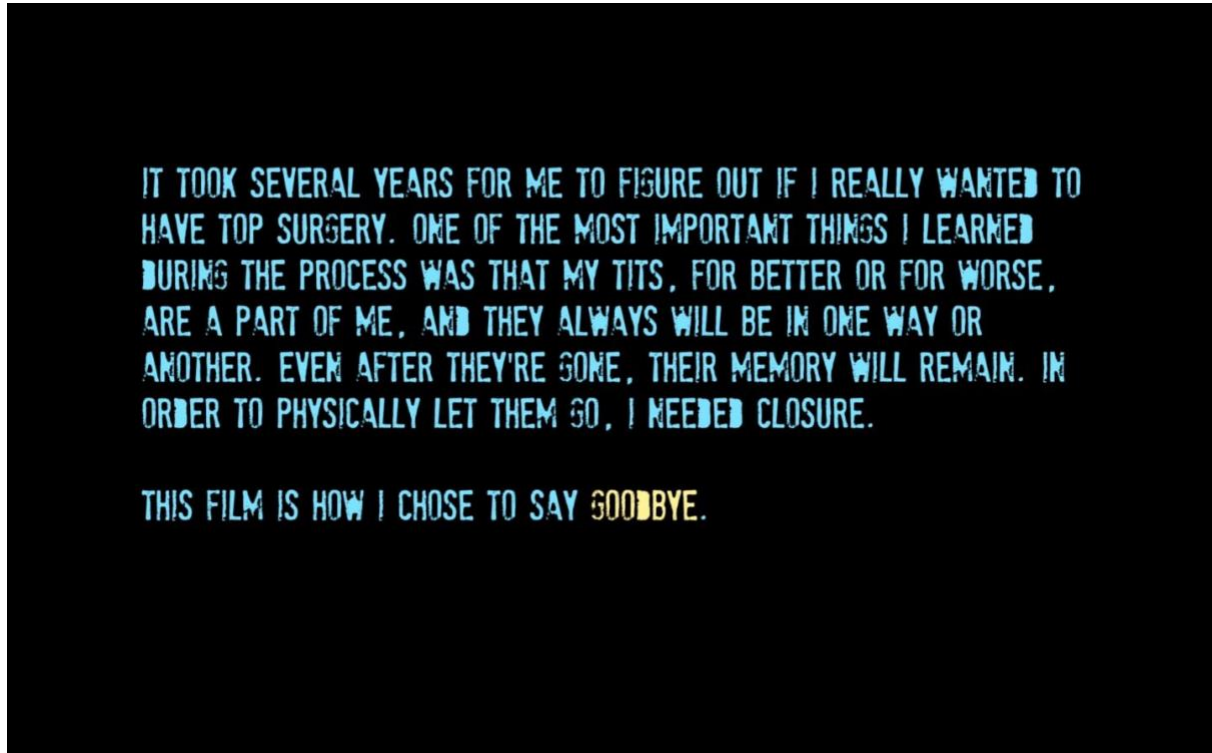


Figure 1. Still [Opening Monologue] (0:00:06) from *Hello Titty* by Skyler Braeden Fox, (Pink Label.TV, 2015).



Figure 2. Still [Outside of Trailer] (0:00:42) from *Hello Titty* by Skyler Braeden Fox, (Pink Label.TV, 2015).



Figure 3. Still [Inside of Trailer] (0:03:16) from *Hello Titty* by Skyler Braeden Fox, (Pink Label.TV, 2015).



Figure 4. Still [Showboy Removing His Shirt] (0:04:00) from *Hello Titty* by Skyler Braeden Fox, (Pink Label.TV, 2015).



Figure 5. Still [Dominatrix Getting Rough] (0:05:36) from *Hello Titty* by Skyler Braeden Fox, (Pink Label.TV, 2015).



Figure 6. Still [Butlerresse and Shy Guy] (0:06:43) from *Hello Titty* by Skyler Braeden Fox, (Pink Label.TV, 2015).



Figure 7. Still [Sex Scene] (0:10:05) from *Hello Titty* by Skyler Braeden Fox, (Pink Label.TV, 2015).



Figure 8. Still [Lactation] (0:11:03) from *Hello Titty* by Skyler Braeden Fox, (Pink Label.TV, 2015).



Figure 9. Still [Dominatrix Giving Butler Dog] (0:13:09) from *Hello Titty* by Skyler Braeden Fox, (Pink Label.TV, 2015).



Figure 10. Still [Closing Scene] (0:14:13) from *Hello Titty* by Skyler Braeden Fox, (Pink Label.TV, 2015).



Figure 11. Still [James in Mirror] (0:00:54) from *Jizz Envy* by James Diamond, (Vtape, 2014).



Figure 12. Still [James and Tasha] (0:01:10) from *Jizz Envy* by James Diamond, (Vtape, 2014).



Figure 13. Still [Tasha and Fountain] (0:01:36) from *Jizz Envy* by James Diamond, (Vtape, 2014).



Figure 14. Image from *The 36 Year-Old Virgin* [Skyler Braeden Fox and Bishop Black. Pink Laber TV, <https://www.pinklabel.tv/on-demand/film/36-year-old-virgin/> (accessed May 22, 2019)

Appendix

Lyrics to James Diamond's *Jizz Envy* (2019)

A short short time ago in a land very near.
Lived a man who was extra queer.
He had even been assigned female at birth.
He had grown a small cock but was not concerned with his girth.
He could you a strap-on to penetrate a partner
And his imagination burned bright like a sparkler.
However, one aspect of his cock that was hard to swallow was that it didn't ejaculate.
No surgery no hormones would ever change the fact that how jizzing felt he could only speculate.
He travailed the world and copulated with a good handful of men, women and others, but still felt like something was missing.
Then one summer day he found himself returning to the city of his birth and finding a woman who stimulate his cock just by kissing.
She had no fear, held him dear, and penetrated his heart soul and art.
She also made a bold move and penetrated his very private part.
It drove him wild and all of a sudden, he felt something stir in his loins.
Like a fantastic fountain where he had once dropped coins.
And wished for world peace. A guitar like Slash or a never-ending stash of cash.
he closed his eyes,
and to his surprise,
flooded her bed with a soaking wet prize.
He once cursed his body but now he became blessed and was forever a magnet to skilled and doctrine hand.
And he went about bragging to all over the land.

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