

**Transmen in Porn:  
Alternative Masculinities and Dilemmas of Visibility**

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## Transmen in Porn?

Pornography is a fascinating realm for academic exploration: it offers important insights into how people construct gender, sexuality, race, and other identities today. Like any other medium, pornography's place and function in society is complicated. Creators of porn often take what is happening in the society around them and respond, making these societal occurrences and instances into fodder for sexually explicit entertainment. Pornography, with its intensely visual nature, can also function as a way for people to learn about sexualities and bodies, mainstream and alternative. Because pornography featuring transgender<sup>1</sup> men is so relatively new in the realm of adult entertainment, I have been unable to locate any scholarship on the topic, though there has been some work produced on transgender women in pornography.<sup>2</sup> This project is an effort to explore some of the major aspects of this genre of pornography in an academic setting.

In this project, I will examine the ways in which the transgender men in the films construct their gender and sexuality for the camera and the audience. This will facilitate my exploration of what the masculinities and sexualities of the transgender men in the films look like, how they operate, and what purposes they might serve in the films. I will position this examination within a variety of scholarship, including Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and R.W. Connell's concept of hegemonic and subordinated masculinities. I will also position the films within Michel Foucault's conceptions of confession and knowledge

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1 According to Kalra (2007), "At its most rudimentary level, the term 'transgender' describes a person whose gender identity and/or expression does not fit into the traditional Western binary model of gender marked by 'male' and 'female'; a transgender person is one whose gender transgresses (hetero)normative standards of social acceptability" (Kalra, 4-5). Many of the men in the films also identify as transsexual, meaning "someone whose gender identity is at odds with the gender category assigned at birth, whether male or female. Transexual people may *transition* from their birth gender to their desired gender by altering their bodies, and may engage in medical forms of transition like hormone replacement therapy and possibly sex reassignment surgery. A transexual woman, or male-to-female transexual (MTF), is a person whose gender identity is female but who was born male-bodied; a transexual man, or female-to-male transexual (FTM), is someone whose gender identity is male, but was born female bodied" (5).

2 See Laura Kipnis's (1999) *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America.*

production to examine how some of the transgender men in the films employ the element of surprise regarding their transgender status. This “coming out,” so to speak, will also fit into Jamison Green's “the dilemma of transgender visibility.”<sup>3</sup> I will explain how the visibility of the men works in regards to their reception and the purpose of the films in general. My overall aim is simply to examine how these films are functioning in a variety of contexts to represent transgender men, both those specifically in the film and transgender men in general.

According to Geoffrey Bateman, pornographic films featuring transgender people have existed for a number of years. He states that, “[t]ranssexual pornographic films emerged in the 1970s, but did not become readily accessible until the early and mid-1980s.”<sup>4</sup> These films, however, exclusively featured transgender women and catered to an audience of primarily heterosexual men. He does, however, mention pornography featuring transgender men. He claims that the first pornographic film featuring transgender men was Christopher Lee's *Alley of the Tranny Boys*, made in 1998, suggesting that transgender men did not begin to star in hard core pornography until at least twenty years after transgender women did. Also, whereas, in the past, the films featuring transgender women were geared primarily toward heterosexual men, Lee's films starring transgender men were transgender porn made by a transgender person for the transgender and queer viewer.<sup>5</sup> As time has passed, the number of pornographic films featuring transgender men has multiplied, especially since the beginning of the twenty-first century. The advent of Buck Angel, arguably the first transgender man porn star and by far the most prolific, and his subsequent success has potentially paved the way for the production of more and more porn starring transgender men. This upswing in such a small genre of pornography is what originally caught my attention and spurred my interest in the present project. Not only was I

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3 Jamison Green, “Look! No, Don't! The Visibility Dilemma for Transsexual Men,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 499.

4 Geoffrey Bateman, “Pornographic Film and Video: Transsexual,” *glbtq: and encyclopedia of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer culture*, [http://www.glbtq.com/arts/porn\\_transsexual.html](http://www.glbtq.com/arts/porn_transsexual.html).

5 Ibid.

taking notice, but so was the rest of the pornography industry. In 2007, Buck Angel became the first transgender man to win the Adult Video Network's Transsexual Performer of the Year Award.<sup>6</sup> In 2005, Buck was also the first transgender man to star in a film made by a major gay male porn studio.<sup>7</sup>

Another source of my interest in this project has to do with my involvement in the struggle for transgender rights. I do not personally identify as transgender. I identify as queer, cisgender<sup>8</sup>, male-bodied, White, and from a working class background. Though I may not be transgender, I have been involved in the movement for transgender rights and in the broader movement for equal rights for all people regardless of gender, gender identity, gender expression, or sexuality. I firmly believe that transgender rights are an integral aspect of any struggle for equal rights and should be treated as such. My examination of these films follows from my interest and involvement in transgender issues and scholarship in that I do not think that the transgender experience, even in pornography, should be elided and ignored. It must be acknowledged and examined, just as the experience of others. It offers genuinely original perspectives when it comes to issues of gender and sexuality.

My methodological approach will generally be inductive in nature. I will take a number of pornographic films starring transgender men and examine them carefully for common themes and features, as well as for their differences. The six films are *Buck's Beaver*, *Buck Fever*, *Diesel Exposed*, *Trannyfags*, *Cubbyholes*, and a scene from *Cirque Noir* featuring Buck Angel. The films, of course, will not be examined in a vacuum. I will position them in relation to a number of fields of scholarship, primarily masculinity and gender studies, discourse analysis, transgender

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6 "About Buck Angel," The Official Buck Angel Fan Site, <http://www.buckangel.com/bio.html>.

7 *Cirque Noir* by Titan Media.

8 Cisgender is term used to refer to people whose gender identities and/or expressions that Western society considers to be a match with one's sex. This term was developed after the term transgender and is used to denormalize people who are cisgender and to put less stigma on those who are transgender. Another term often used is "biological male" or "biological female." I prefer the term cisgender, as naming something "biological" tends to make it more legitimate in the eyes of society. I will use this term throughout this project.

studies, and pornography studies. Through this positioning I hope to gain a clearer and more comprehensive picture of the films as texts.

As with any project, this analysis is lacking in a number of areas. In particular, I was only able to choose a few films from the many that exist, due to limited funds and time. Had I had more time, I might have been able to include more sources and theoretical background for a richer analysis. Also, a number of films have been released since I began this project. Both the maker of *Trannyfags* and the maker of *Cubbyholes* have each released a new film. These films explore different aspects of transgender men's experiences. My exploration of race in the films would change if I were to examine these films, as they include far more transgender men of color than the films I look at here. Unfortunately, due to those constraints outlined above, I am not able to expand my analysis through the examination of more films.

In the first chapter, I outline the various sources and theories that I use to explore and examine the films featuring transgender men. The second chapter discusses the ways in which the men in the films construct, perform, and constitute their gender, namely their masculinities. I then turn to the theory of hegemonic and subordinated masculinities to examine how these masculinities function together, in relation with each other, with the cisgender people in the films, and with hegemonic masculinity in general. In the third chapter, I begin with an examination of the different instances of the element of surprise surrounding transgender identities and bodies in the films. I then use Foucault's theories of confession and knowledge production in an attempt to situate the use of surprise. I also position the films within the larger discourse of the dilemma of transgender visibility and examine how their hyper-visible nature helps to determine their broader impact, including how they might influence the ways in which transgender men, their bodies, and their sexualities are perceived.

This thesis will bring together a number of different areas of academic scholarship and

theory which are often not in conversation with pornography, even much less in conversation with such a new genre as pornography featuring transgender men. I hope that this project will open up new vistas of transgender scholarship and the academic inquiry of pornography. I hope to generate more questions than I answer and fuel the flames of intellectual curiosity, as I know this project has done for me in more ways than one.



## Chapter One: Literature Review

For this project, I am drawing on a number of theoretical models and areas of scholarly analysis. This literature review examines three primary fields of interest which, though I have separated them, overlap in many key instances. The first is that of theories of gender and masculinity. This includes Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and her subsequent work on the construction of sex. R.W. Connell's work in the field of masculinity studies, especially his concepts of hegemonic and subordinated masculinities, are especially important in examining the masculinities of transgender men. Judith Halberstam's scholarship on female masculinity, however, provides a pertinent counterpoint to the majority of masculinity studies.

The second primary field of interest is that of scholarship about transgender men. The writings of Jason Cromwell, Jamison Greene, and Patrick Califia are all important in that they are all transgender men writing about transgender men; they are able to speak from the position of the insider. Works by scholars such as Andrew Forshee and David Schleifler give insight into a variety of topics central to this project, including issues of transgender men's sexuality and how transgender men perceive their own masculinity.

The third category of scholarship most relevant to the current project is that of the work that has been produced about pornography. Linda Williams' book *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* and her subsequent article "Second Thoughts on *Hard Core*" are both integral sources in that they articulate a genealogy of hard core pornography in the United States and explicate some of the most important concepts in the field of pornography studies today. Other works in the anthology *More Dirty Looks: Gender, Pornography, and Power* provide ways of imagining and examining other types of pornography, non-heterosexual pornography such as gay male and crossdresser pornography, which will provide a good

juxtaposition to other forms of non-heterosexual pornography, such as porn featuring transgender men.

## **Gender**

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler claims that “gender proves to be performative” and that “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results.”<sup>1</sup> She also contends that “gender is the repeated stylization of the body.”<sup>2</sup> In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler defines performativity “not as single or deliberate “act,” but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effect that it names.”<sup>3</sup> The performative nature of gender is also explained in “Doing Gender” by Candace West and Donald Zimmerman where they “contend that the 'doing' of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production.”<sup>4</sup> At the same time, they also describe gender as “an accomplishment, an achieved property of situated conduct.”<sup>5</sup>

The theory of the performativity of gender is integral to one of the central topics of this project, namely how transgender men are performing and constructing their gender, their masculinity, in these films. The actors are performing on a number of levels. In one sense, they are literally performing in a theatrical sense for a camera and an audience. Their performance is recorded for the sale and viewing pleasure of anyone who wishes to purchase it. In another sense, they are performing the gender on the screen. Their actions, the people with whom they have sex, what their bodies look like, how they talk and what they say when they talk, even their

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1 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 33.

2 Ibid., 43.

3 Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 2.

4 Candace West and Don Zimmerman, “Doing Gender,” *Gender and Society* 1, no. 2 (1987): 126.

5 Ibid.

body modifications, such as tattoos and piercings, all of these work to constitute the performance that is their gender. With Butler's concept that gender identity is constituted by expressions of gender, it can be interpreted that, by watching the films, one is able to see, and perhaps interpret, that very constitution. Because sexuality and gender are so inextricably linked in our culture, one is able to see gender being constituted through the sex acts that are being performed. One could also ask the question of whether the continued performance of their masculinities in these films is a means by which to cement their masculinities and themselves as men.

When it comes to the field of masculinity studies, R.W. Connell's concept of "hegemonic masculinity" is of central importance.<sup>6</sup> Hegemonic masculinity is the form of masculinity that is in the relative state of ascendancy.<sup>7</sup> The concept also implies the existence of other forms of masculinity, different masculinities that currently are not hegemonic, but may be complicit, subordinated, or suppressed.<sup>8</sup> This provides another important framework for analyzing what forms of masculinity the transgender men in the films are producing. Are they merely mimicking dominant forms and portrayals of masculinity, or are they perhaps deploying other, more subversive models of masculinity before the audience?

There are a variety of ways in which the transgender men in the films can be seen as disrupting notions of hegemonic masculinity. One is in the very existence of their bodies. They are men who are female-bodied. Under the concept of hegemonic masculinity, men's genitals should be aligned with what society perceives as "natural" and "correct" for a man, namely a penis and testicles. This physical disruption can go even further if the transgender man has not undergone chest reconstruction surgery and still has breasts. The choice of sexual partners can

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6 R.W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 183.

7 *Ibid.*, 184.

8 R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 76-81.

also disrupt hegemonic masculinity. All of the transgender men in the films are either gay or bisexual in that they all have sex with other men. Hegemonic masculinity demands heterosexuality from men, a demand which is blatantly refuted by the transgender men in the films.

Another important concept for this project is what happens when masculinity is performed in and on bodies that are not classified as male. The book *Female Masculinity*, Judith Halberstam explores this exact issue. On the first page, Halberstam claims that “far from being an imitation of maleness, female masculinity actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity.”<sup>9</sup> One of Halberstam primary contentions with masculinity studies as it is currently practiced in the academy is that it always already locates masculinity in the male body, as intrinsically linked to maleness.<sup>10</sup> Through her discussions and analyses of various historical and contemporary figures and cultural productions, Halberstam centers female masculinity and explores how masculinity is constructed and performed by female-bodied people. Her explorations are important to the project at hand because they provide an alternative way in which to analyze masculinity and how it manifests in a variety of bodies, including those of transgender men. She straightforwardly states that “transsexuality and transgenderism do afford unique opportunities to track explicit performances of nondominant masculinity.”<sup>11</sup> This is one of the primary purposes of my project, to examine how transgender men in pornography perform their masculinities and what kind of masculinities are performed. Also important is Halberstam's chapter “Transgender Butch: Butch/FTM Border Wars and the Masculine Continuum,” in which she examines the “borderlands” between butch lesbians and transgender

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9 Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 1.

10 Ibid., 13-17.

11 Ibid., 40.

men and the multiplicity of issues and conflicts therein.<sup>12</sup>

## **Transgender Men**

In addition to theories and concepts of gender, another integral background to this project is scholarly work that has already been produced about transgender men. By examining this work, I will utilize the perspectives about transgender men that other researchers have gained to develop a deeper understanding of transgender men's gender, sexual, racial, and other identities. Two pieces in particular that help to situate the discussion around how transgender men view their own masculinity are the article "Part of the Package: Ideas of Masculinity Among Male-Identified Transpeople" by Jamison Green, and *Perception of Masculinity Among Transgender Men*, and unpublished doctoral dissertation by Andrew Forshee. The piece by Jamison Green, himself a transgender man, acts as a starting point for the exploration of issues of masculinity among transgender men. After a literature review of some of the work concerning transgender masculinity, Green writes about how a group of transgender men he interviewed responded to a number of questions about their own masculinity. The questions he asked included whether or not masculinity and maleness were the same thing; whether masculinity depended on being male-bodied or having a penis; how did they come to understand their masculinity; where does masculinity come from; how is it expressed; and what does it mean to be masculine.<sup>13</sup> The responses to these questions are of interest in that they provide some insight into how transgender men think of their own identities, such as how masculinity is expressed and how the universal response when asked if masculinity depended on being male-bodied was "no."<sup>14</sup> How

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12 Ibid., 141-143.

13 Jamison Green, "Part of the Package: Ideas of Masculinity among Male-Identified Transpeople," *Men and Masculinities* 7, no. 3 (Jan. 2005): 295-297.

14 Ibid.

transgender men think masculinity is expressed influences how they express their own masculinity, including in the context of acting in a pornographic film. Also, their belief that masculinity does not depend on having a male body is important in that many of the actors in the films are not male-bodied, yet identify as men and construct and perform their masculinity for a camera and an audience.

Andrew Forshee's work focuses on the same topic as Green's, but goes into far greater detail and scope. Noting that “throughout the literature on transgender populations, transmen are the least studied group,”<sup>15</sup> Forshee's study aims to “describe how transmen defined, perceived, and experienced the social construction of masculinity.”<sup>16</sup> In addition to an online questionnaire, Forshee also did in-depth interviews with seven different transgender men.<sup>17</sup> Many themes similar to what Green found are also found in this study, such as the idea that “a penis doesn't make a man.”<sup>18</sup> Other ideas and themes were present as well, such as the experiential nature of masculinity, the developmental nature of being a man, and the power of perspective.<sup>19</sup> Green's and Forshee's pieces nicely compliment each other in that Forshee fleshes out many of the topics that Green introduces about transgender men's ideas of their masculinity. How transgender men think about their masculinities directly affects how they perform them, both on screen and off. Also useful will be Patrick Califia's article “Manliness.” In this short piece, Califia explores his experience of his own masculinity and of being a transgender man.<sup>20</sup> This provides yet another avenue through which to explore transgender men's perceptions of their own masculinities, that of personal narrative and recollection.

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15 Andrew Forshee, “Perceptions of Masculinity among Transgender Men” (PhD diss., Walden University, 2006), 4.

16 Ibid., 6.

17 Ibid., 10.

18 Ibid., 91.

19 Ibid., 80.

20 Patrick Califia, “Manliness,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 434.

Though both Green and Forshee discuss the sexualities of transgender men, they primarily write about heterosexual transgender men. For a broader view of transgender sexuality, I turn to the article “Make Me Feel Mighty Real: Gay Female-to-Male Transgenderists Negotiating Sex, Gender, and Sexuality” by David Schleifer. Using interviews with five gay transgender men, Schleifer examines how gay transgender men construct the categories of sex, gender, and sexuality in their own lives. He also explores how the categories of sex, gender, and sexuality “serve to mutually constitute each other and they only function in relation to each other.”<sup>21</sup> The insights from this article are key to the current project in that every one of the transgender men in the films being examined are either gay or bisexual; none of them are completely heterosexual. Looking at work about only heterosexual transgender men would leave out an important piece of the puzzle.

Other than how masculinity is constructed and performed, another central concept of this project is that of the dilemma of transgender visibility.<sup>22</sup> In Jamison Green's “Look! No, Don't!: The Visibility Dilemma for Transsexual Men,” the dilemma is described as follows:

Transsexual experience becomes invisible, he claims, in direct proportion to the success of appearing to others as a member of one's subjectively experienced gender; conversely, to the extent that one reveals a transsexual life course to others, one risks undermining the achieved gender status.<sup>23</sup>

Green then explores his own negotiation of this particular dilemma in his life. This concept has huge implications for my current project. The transgender men in the films are not only coming out as transgender; they are putting their bodies on display for anyone in the world to see. By exposing their naked bodies, they are revealing their status as transgender men, thus endangering the perceptions that others might have of them as men. What does this mean for their identities?

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21 David Schleifer, “Make Me Feel Mighty Real: Gay Female-to-Male Transgenderists Negotiating Sex, Gender, and Sexuality,” *Sexualities* 9, no. 1 (Feb. 2006): 58.

22 Green, “Look! No, Don't! The Visibility Dilemma for Transsexual Men,” 499.

23 Ibid.

Are they undermining themselves, or are they attempting to reinforce themselves as transgender men? Could we say that the transgender men in the film are performing a type of “hyper-visibility?” If so, how does it work and what might be its purpose? These are only a couple of the questions that this article and concept bring to the fore.

A clue as to what the transgender men in the films are doing and why they are risking their achieved gender status in the eyes of the viewing public lies in the work of Jason Cromwell. In his book *Transmen and FTMs*, Cromwell discusses the variety of discourses that have existed and do exist around transgender men. Moving away from various medical discourses, Cromwell suggests that, through language and community organizing, transgender people are finally able to create and utilize their own “transdiscourses,” instead of relying on those discourses provided by medical authorities.<sup>24</sup> He also discusses the creation of “transsubjectivities” by and for transgender people (134-136).<sup>25</sup> Is this perhaps what is happening in the films that the current project is examining? Are the transgender men in fact creating their own discourses and subjectivities to counter those that are imposed upon them by outside forces, such as the medical establishment and even possibly certain types of erotic cultural creation, such as mainstream pornography? To help answer many of these questions and those above concerning transgender visibility, I will be utilizing Michel Foucault's concept of confession and the ways in which it engages in the production of knowledge to determine what kind of knowledge the men in these films are constructing.

## **Pornography**

In the realm of pornography studies, one of the most important works is *Hard Core*:

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24 Jason Cromwell, *Transmen and FTMs: Identities, Bodies, Genders, and Sexualities* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 24-26.

25 Ibid., 134-136.



*Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* by Linda Williams. In this book, Williams tracks the history of hard core pornography, from the beginning of photography to the present day. Along the way, she delves into a variety of issues that hard core pornography in its various forms presents and negotiates. In the chapter "Prehistory: the 'Frenzy of the Visible,'" Williams begins with the invention of cinema and how it relates to the development of hard core pornography. One of the central themes of the book is discussed in this chapter, namely that "while it is possible, in a certain, limited and reductive way, to 'represent' the physical pleasure of the male by showing erection and ejaculation, the maximum visibility proves elusive in the parallel confession of female sexual pleasure."<sup>26</sup> This theme is relevant to the current project in that, though the transgender men on the screen are men, they do not obtain an erection nor do they ejaculate in the same way as cisgender men. Their pleasure is also elusive.

This particular theme carries over into another chapter titled "Fetishism and Hard Core: Marx, Freud, and the 'Money Shot'". The money shot, or the ejaculation of the male performer, is often seen as being essential to hard core pornography.<sup>27</sup> Williams interrogates the discourses surrounding the money shot, arriving at the idea that "the money shot could thus finally be viewed as that moment when the phallic male libidinal and material economy most falters."<sup>28</sup> With regards to the phallic economy, Williams also discusses the "inability of a phallic visual economy to imagine female pleasure as anything but either insufficiency or excess."<sup>29</sup> What about transgender men? Where do they fit into a phallic visual economy? What does it mean to have men in hard core pornography, but no money shot? Could the lack of a money shot in porn with transgender men be a potential resistance to a phallic economy? The theoretical

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26 Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (Berkeley: University of California, 1989), 49.

27 *Ibid.*, 93-94.

28 *Ibid.*, 28.

29 *Ibid.*, 109.

formulations of Williams will help to negotiate and answer these questions in the current project.

In the chapters “Generic Pleasures: Number and Narrative” and “Hard-Core Utopias: Problems and Solutions” discuss hard core as a filmic genre and the various tropes that exist within it. These discussions assist the current project in determining which common conventions of hard core pornography transgender men are employing and which they are not. The chapter that discusses sadomasochistic pornography, entitled “Power, Pleasure, and Perversion: Sadomasochistic Film Pornography” will provide insight as there are a number of scenes in the pornography with transgender men in which they engage in sadomasochistic sex. Her chapter “Sequels and Re-Visions: 'A Desire of One's Own'” describes a new trend in the history of pornography, that of women producing hard core porn. She sees this as a potentially empowering avenue for women. Extending this to pornography made by transgender men, there is the possibility for such porn to also be empowering and liberating for other transgender men who may consume it. A later piece by Williams, entitled “Second Thoughts on Hard Core: American Obscenity Law and Scapegoating of Deviance,” explores the ways in which obscenity law in the United States has shifted, which provides a legal context for the pornography that the current project is analyzing.

One of the primary gaps in Linda Williams' otherwise comprehensive volume is that she solely focuses on heterosexual pornography. She does not engage with any sort of non-heterosexual porn, whether it be gay male, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or anything else. She justifies this move by saying that “because lesbian and gay pornography do not address me personally, their initial mapping as genres properly belongs to those who can read them better.”<sup>30</sup> Because the none of the transgender men in the films are heterosexual or perform solely heterosexual acts, I must rely on other scholarship to pick up where Williams leaves off. The

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 7.

article “Idol Thoughts: Orgasm and Self-Reflexivity in Gay Pornography” by Richard Dyer is helpful in that it examines the ways in which some gay porn refers to itself as pornography, something that some of the films starring transgender men do as well.<sup>31</sup> His research however, still focuses on the money shot and on cisgender gay men. This is a conceptual gap that I hope to help fill in the current project.

Though I have situated various literature into different categories for this review, this does not mean that they are at all separate. They work with each other and influence each other in important ways. Without the various theories of gender, research and scholarship concerning transgender men might not even exist. Also, gender theories play an important role in the analysis of pornography. The integration and synthesis of these various sources, concepts, and theoretical models will be essential for the execution of the project at hand.

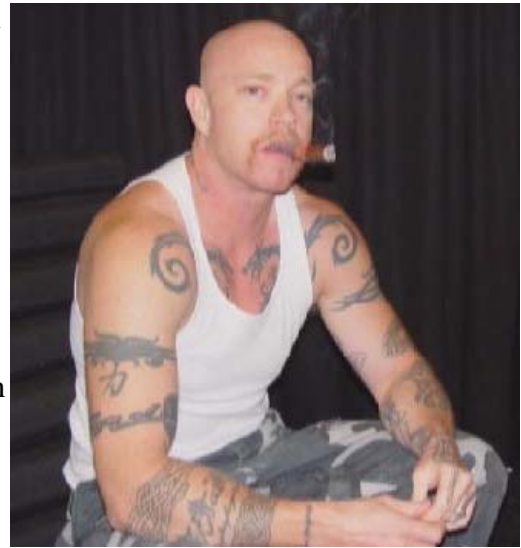
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31 Richard Dyer, “Idol Thoughts: Orgasm and Self-Reflexivity in Gay Pornography,” in *More Dirty Looks: Gender, Pornography and Power*, ed. Pamela Church Gibson (London: British Film Institute, 2004), 102.

## Chapter Two: Gender Performance and Alternative Masculinities

### Opening Scenes

In the 2004 film *Buck's Beaver*, the first time that the star, Buck Angel, speaks is in an interview segment, not a sex scene. During the interview, Buck is facing the camera and answering the questions of an off-camera interviewer. Buck is the only person on camera. From the very moment the scene begins, before he even says a single word, Buck is performing his gender. He is a muscular, heavily tattooed white man, with tattoos all along his arms, on his hands, and on his chest. One is able to see his chest tattoos because he is wearing a white sleeveless A-shirt. Below the waist he is garbed in camouflage cargo pants. His legs are spread wide, on which he props himself up with his elbows. He periodically takes a puff off a cigar, which he holds in one hand. His head is shaved bald and he sports a handlebar mustache. Buck's demeanor and clothing are all integral in the performance and establishment of his gender. If, as Judith Butler claims, gender “is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results,” Buck is performing and constituting his gender in everything that he does, even when he is not speaking or having sex.<sup>1</sup> He expresses and constitutes his gender through his clothes, the way in which he positions his body, even his choice of hairstyle and tobacco product. His shaved head, handlebar mustache, and cigar constitute him as being not only masculine, but a



*Illustration 1: Buck Angel in the opening scene from "Buck's Beaver."*

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<sup>1</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 33.

certain form of butch, namely that of a gay leatherman (minus the leather).<sup>2</sup> However, when these are combined with the white A-shirt, they evoke another sort of masculinity, that of white, working-class masculinity. His posture of leaning forward with legs spread wide further constitutes him as masculine. He is taking up space in the room and being forthright, if not aggressive. His stance, demeanor, dress, and (clothed) body all exclaim his masculinity for the world to see, or at least for any viewing audience.

When Buck begins to be interviewed and begins to speak, he continues to constitute his gender and masculinity, albeit in a particular way. In this segment, he is revealing his status as a transgender man, even going so far as to pull down his pants and show his genitals to the camera and the interviewer. Throughout this process, Buck verbally asserts and reasserts that he is, in fact, a man. When explaining the fact that he is transgender, he states, “I am a hundred percent man, as you can see.” The interviewer also points out the fact that he looks very masculine. Through his actions, his words, his posture, and his look, Buck is continually performing, constituting, and reaffirming his masculinity. The fact that Buck is a transgender man has great implications for what kind of masculinity he inhabits and performs, but that will be discussed later.

The opening scenes of each of the films are vitally important in regards to the actors' gender performance and assertion. The opening scene is the audience's first glimpse of the transgender men. They are performing their gender from the moment they appear on the screen. They are performing in the sense that they are in a film, acting before a camera. They are also performing in the sense of performativity, which Butler defines as “not...a single or deliberate

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2 Michael Bronski, “A Dream is a Wish Your Heart Makes: Notes on the Materialization of Sexual Fantasy,” in *Leatherfolk: Radical Sex, People, Politics, and Practice*, ed. Mark Thompson (Boston: Alyson Publications, Inc., 1991), 56-57. For pictorial representations of gay leathermen, please see the illustrations of Tom of Finland, an excellent compilation of which is *Tom of Finland: the Art of Pleasure*, published by Taschen.

'act,' but, rather...the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effect that it names.”<sup>3</sup> One might not define the clothes, hair, or body modifications of the transgender men as single or discrete acts, but they are still performance in the sense that they are citational practices; the men are “citing” masculinity as all men do when they are enacting their gender in the world. “Man” and “masculinity” are the “texts” that are being cited and referenced in this performance of identity. To establish their identity as men, these citations and performances are necessary. The opening scenes of the films are so important because they provide the first opportunity for the performers to establish and constitute their gender for the camera and the audience. As the saying goes, one must make a great first impression. The opening scene gives the performers that chance: the chance to force the audience to recognize and accept their self-identified genders.

Another example of the establishment and constitution of gender is in the opening scene of the film *Trannyfags*. The film opens with a shot of Billy Coyote on a payphone. He is a young White man dressed in a white t-shirt and blue jeans held up by a metal-studded belt. He has various tattoos on his arms and his hair is styled in a pink Mohawk with the sides shaved. He is talking on the phone with Joey Genoa, who is on his cell phone. Joey is a White man dressed in black jeans and a sleeveless black t-shirt. He has pierced earlobes and a partial beard. His hair is styled in dreadlocks and is covered with a baseball cap. When asked how he is doing, Joey responds that he is under house arrest at his mother's house. Billy then says that he will “get the guys together” and visit him. The film then cuts to a shot of Billy and two other performers, Mark Van Helsing and Hugo Salt, coming out of a Walgreen's and heading for their car. Mark is a thin White man dressed in gray cutoff shorts and a blue jean jacket, under which he is wearing no shirt so that his chest is visible. He is sporting a shaved head, a pair of

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3 Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 2.

sunglasses, and two lip piercings. Hugo Salt is wearing black pants and a dark button-down work shirt. He is carrying a case of Rolling Rock beer out of the store. All three of them climb into a white convertible and pull out of the parking lot. During this scene, the fast paced background music is interspersed with the noises of car engines starting and revving.

Once again, this opening scene does the job of constituting and confirming the gender of the transgender men who are involved. The masculinities that they are articulating, however, are rather different from the masculinity of Buck Angel. Whereas Buck Angel is performing a very butch sort of masculinity in the opening scene, the transgender men of *Trannyfags* perform a variety of alternative masculinities. One way in which they stray from traditionally butch masculinity is in their choice of hair styles. Though one of them has a shaved head, one has a pink Mohawk and another has long dreadlocks. These styles, plus the pink hair color, indicate affiliation with alternative subcultures, such as punk, that are not generally associated with typical masculinity, as the male body is traditionally supposed to be unmarked, by either ink or jewelry. Their choice of body modifications, such as their tattoos and ear and lip piercings also mark them as non-traditional men. Though the tattooing is reminiscent of Buck Angel, the piercings are different. The use of facial piercings tends to be less acceptable to the general public, thus further marking them as alternative men. Their body type is also different from Buck Angel's. They tend to be much thinner. They are not heavily muscled, something that is often a marker of more butch masculinity. Even their age matters in this instance. They are all younger men, none of whom could be over their late twenties. Their youth raises the issue of experience in the world, something that is generally assumed to make one more masculine, more authoritative as a man. Their age undermines this, perhaps positing that younger men can constitute their masculinity alternatively, making a different space for themselves. When any of

the men in the opening scene of *Trannyfags* do speak, they are once again, just like Buck Angel in his opening scene, performing a certain masculinity. In the conversation that Billy Coyote has on the payphone with Joey Genoa, Joey mentions that he is under house arrest for an undisclosed crime. Criminality is often seen as a marker of masculinity, specifically an alternative, criminal masculinity.<sup>4</sup> Though the average man is not supposed to commit crimes, the criminal man does so and is defined by and through them. Joey's home incarceration marks his masculinity as being vaguely shadowy, lending a sort of "bad boy" image. The fact that he is under house arrest at his mother's house only serves to reinforce the fact that he (and the other transgender men in the film) are young and not yet stable enough to be out on their own.

Buck Angel and the four transgender men in *Trannyfags* are all establishing their gender in the opening scenes of their respective films. Though they may be expressing different forms of masculinity, they are all still constituting themselves distinctly as men. They do this through a variety of means, including clothing, demeanor, and what they talk about. This constitution of gender continues into the primary focus of the films, the sex scenes, during which their sexual performance also functions as a performance of gender and masculinity.

### **Sex Scenes: Getting Down to Business**

In the first sex scene in *Buck's Beaver*, Buck is in the center of the screen, seated on a sofa. He is dressed severely with a black, short-sleeve button-down shirt, black leather pants, and black boots. Once again, he is being interviewed by someone off-camera. He is specifically talking about his sexual tastes and proclivities. He identifies as bisexual and as sexually dominant with both men and women. Buck then calls over his submissive, Kitty, a White cisgender woman, and the scene begins in earnest. Kitty is dressed in a see-through top, a black

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4 Connell, *Masculinities*, 110.



bra, and a pair of black underwear. During the scene, Buck makes Kitty lick his boots, perform oral sex on him, and penetrate herself with a large black dildo. He also blows cigar smoke in her mouth, spits on her, and makes her vaginally penetrate him with another dildo. Even when he is being penetrated, Buck remains in control of the scene. He also makes explicit mention of consent, saying that nothing is done without Kitty wanting it. Buck is also the dominant figure in the last scene of the film, in which he performs with another White cisgender woman named Lena Ramon. In this scene, Lena is a call girl whom Buck has employed for sexual services. During the scene, she performs oral sex on him and he penetrates her with a dildo. Eventually they use a double-headed dildo to penetrate each other at the same time.

In each of these scenes, Buck is establishing himself further as a man, specifically a butch, masculine man. His dress in all black and leather constructs him as a practitioner of S/M and leather sex, a practice that comes with explicitly dominant and submissive roles, of which he is occupying the position of dominance. Though this is not by any means always the case in reality, in the realm of stereotypical masculinity, the man is dominant and on top. By remaining in control of the scene even when he is being penetrated, Buck performs the role of the masculine man who is always dominant in all situations, especially sexual ones. It should be noted, however, that this is all within the realm of a controlled play setting. Buck is also the dominant figure in the scene with Lena Ramon, though the scene is not explicitly a dominance and submission scene. By playing the role of the client of a sex worker, Buck positions himself in a role of power, as, traditionally, sex workers are seen as powerless and at the whim of them men who employ them. He also remains in control by telling her exactly what to do and directing her actions. In both of these scenes, Buck's position as dominant reinforces his masculinity for the audience, firmly ensconcing him in a space of power. During both of these

scenes, both Buck and the women with whom he is performing talk quite a bit about penis size. They comment on the size of the dildos that Buck uses and on the size of Buck's genitals, specifically his clitoris, saying, "Look how big my cock is." This focus on penis size indicates Buck as a true man, especially in the characterizing of his clitoris as a "cock." This is reminiscent of quite a bit of other pornography, both gay and straight, which is obsessed with penis size.

This constructing of the self as masculine for Buck is not limited to one particular film. It is apparent in another of his films, *Buck Fever*. The opening scene finds Buck sitting behind a desk in an office setting. He is wearing blue jeans and a black sleeveless A-shirt. In walks Wendy Williams, a White transgender woman, who is wearing what appears to be a one-piece business suit, minus the pant legs. He thanks her for showing up, compliments her on her looks and then tells her that they will do an "audition," presumably for a role in a pornographic film. During the course of the scene, as they explore each other bodies, they each discover that the other is transgender, with Wendy having male genitalia and Buck having female genitalia. Buck penetrates Wendy anally with a dildo and Wendy vaginally penetrates Buck. At the end of the scene, Wendy asks, "Did I get the job?" to which Buck responds by looking directly into the camera and saying, "She got the job."

In this instance, Buck is still playing a dominant role, albeit much more subtly. Buck is performing the role of the potential employer, while Wendy is performing the role of the potential employee. This is traditionally a gendered situation, in which the potential employer is a man, while the potential employee is a woman. In the context of the film, it is played out in this stereotypic fashion, though a bit different as the man and woman in this situation are both transgender. Buck, however, remains in control of the scene. He is the one who is auditioning

her. She is at his mercy, as she is the one who is looking for a role in his film. Once again, the element of sex work rears its head, as working in pornographic films is classified as a form of sex work.<sup>5</sup> In the context of this scene, Wendy is the laborer while Buck is the one directing and controlling her labor; he is effectively her boss. By placing himself in a role that is dominant and traditionally occupied by a man, Buck further cements himself as a man and shores up his masculinity. Even at the end of the scene, when Wendy directly asks him a question, Buck does not answer her. Instead he directs his attention toward the camera and the audience, presumably male, as is the primary audience for pornography in general.<sup>6</sup> By referring to another (supposed) man instead of a woman, he touches on the notion of male bonding and masculine camaraderie. He invites himself into such male spaces, thus implanting himself as a man.

As mentioned above, Buck is not only dominant with women; he is also dominant with men. This is particularly evident in one scene in *Buck's Beaver* in which he performs with a White cisgender man named Jeff Cambell. This is a prison role-playing scene wherein Buck is the prison guard and Jeff is the inmate. Buck puts Jeff into a cell by himself for having sex with another male inmate and “being a fag.” Buck leaves and Jeff begins to masturbate while Buck surreptitiously watches from behind the door. Buck then barges in and interrogates Jeff about masturbating and forces him to continue to do so. He then pulls a dildo out of his pants just enough so that the base is hidden and forces Jeff to perform oral on the dildo. Buck then anally penetrates Jeff with the dildo. Buck places the dildo on the table, much to the surprise of Jeff. Buck then performs oral sex on Jeff and Jeff subsequently vaginally penetrates Buck at Buck's command.

Another scene in which Buck is dominant over other men is in the film *Cirque Noir*, one

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5 Marlene Wassermann, “Positive, Powerful Pornography,” *Agenda*, no. 28 (1996): 61.

6 Williams, *Hard Core*, 229.

of the few films Buck appears in but does not direct. He is only in the final scene of the film. He is playing the role of a strongman in the circus. Buck and Tober Brandt, a White cisgender man, get into an argument and with the help of another White cisgender man, Logan Steele, Buck dominates Tober and takes control of the scene. Throughout the scene, the three of them perform oral, anal, and vaginal sex in a variety of combinations and positions. The scene culminates with Buck anally fisting both Logan and Tober at the same time.

In both of these scenes in which Buck performs only with men, he is clearly the dominant person. In the first scene, he plays the

role of a prison guard, a role imbued with masculinity, perhaps even violent masculinity. He dominates another man, this one playing the role of a prisoner, a powerless role in our society. The power dynamics of this scene are drastically one-sided in favor of Buck. By



performing the hyper-masculinity of the

*Illustration 2: Buck Angel as prison guard penetrating Jeff Cambell in "Buck's Beaver."*

prison guard, he is constituting himself as intensely masculine. Also, by calling the other man a

“fag,” Buck demeans his masculinity, thereby reinforcing and shoring up his own. As R.W.

Connell notes, one of the functions of masculinity is to subordinate and exclude those

masculinities which do not measure up to hegemonic standards.<sup>7</sup> By doing so, it positions itself

as the dominant formation of masculinity. In the scene in *Cirque Noir*, the men whom Buck

dominates are by no means weak or small. In fact, they are much more muscular and masculine-

looking than he is. By taking control of them and the scene as a whole, Buck constructs himself

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<sup>7</sup> Connell, *Masculinities*, 78-79.

as the alpha male in the scene. In this sense, his masculinity is unimpeachable and he will not be shown as being unmanly or unmasculine by anyone, man or woman.

Much like Buck Angel, other transgender men in the pornographic films also construct, perform, and constitute their gender and masculinity in the sex scenes in which they perform. One such performer is named Diesel. He is a White transgender man who resembles a gay bear with his beard, abundance of body hair, and husky physique. Throughout a number of the scenes, Diesel remains fully clothed, generally in a black leather vest, black leather boots, and black shorts. In two of the scenes in his film *Diesel Exposed*, Diesel performs in a threesome. In one of the threesomes and in a scene with one man, the context is that of an S/M scene. In all instances, whether S/M or not, Diesel is in control of the scene. In some cases, he doesn't even have direct sexual contact with the performers. He always, however, orchestrates the action in the scenes. In one of the scenes, he is performing with a master and his slave. In another, Diesel functions as the master. In the second of the threesome scenes, Diesel does not have sex at all, but instead directs the action between the other two men. All of the men in the film besides Diesel are cisgender. In none of these particular scenes is Diesel penetrated; he does the anal penetration, aided by a dildo.

These scenes in which Diesel performs all help to constitute him as masculine and as a man. First of all, he is the dominant actor in each scene. Even when he isn't having sex or doesn't function as the designated "master," he still controls and directs all of the sexual action. He tells people what to do, how to do it, and how to position themselves. By exerting such a form of all-powerful control over the scene, he asserts himself as the man in charge, able to dominate even a master. He is therefore the most masculine by being the most dominant. Also, by not always having sex in the scene, he positions himself as less vulnerable to the lens of the

camera and the audience. He is under less scrutiny as he is not explicitly acting and performing. By being paid attention to less, his masculinity has a greater chance of staying intact. The fact that he often remains clothed serves a similar function. His body is not as readily viewed and therefore under less pressure to measure up to a particular version of the masculine body. He also stays full clothed for the aspect of surprise, which he deploys at the end of almost every scene. Due to the fact that, not only does he have female genitalia like all the other transgender men in the films, but he also has a pair of very large breasts, he must remain clothed to both avoid scrutiny and maintain an element of surprise.

### **What Does It Look Like?**

When it comes to the question of what kind of masculinity the transgender men in the films are articulating, constructing, constituting, and performing, it is helpful to turn to one of the premier scholars in masculinity studies and gender studies, R.W. Connell. Connell's theorizations of hegemonic masculinity and the social relations among and between masculinities prove to be enlightening. Borrowing from Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, Connell describes the theory of hegemonic masculinity. According to Connell, "hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women."<sup>8</sup> In other words, hegemonic masculinity is that form of masculinity which is in the current state of ascendancy in the gender order, which is "the macro-politics of gender" on a society-wide scale.<sup>9</sup> Hegemonic masculinity is generally not based on violence, but is instead premised on complicity and ideology, though this does not, by any means, indicate that

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8 Connell, *Masculinities*, 77.

9 *Ibid.*, 139.

violence is not compatible with hegemonic masculinity; sometimes it is used to great effect.<sup>10</sup>

Hegemonic masculinity is premised on the global domination of women by men. Another important aspect is that it is also based on the subordination and/or complicity of alternative and marginal masculinities. As Connell states, “hegemony does not mean total cultural dominance, the obliteration of alternatives.”<sup>11</sup> He claims that, rather than being completely eliminated, other alternative forms of masculinity are instead subordinated to hegemonic masculinity. This focus on the relations between and among masculinities is crucial because hegemonic masculinity is not “always and everywhere the same” and that hegemonic masculinity is “a position always contestable.”<sup>12</sup> Some forms of masculinity, while being subordinated, are also complicit in the domination of women and other men in the gender order. Some masculinities, while being subordinated, are also resistant toward hegemonic masculinity and attempt to subvert and change the gender order. All of this is to show that there is no such thing as a singular “masculinity,” but instead a plurality of “masculinities” which relate to each other in a plethora of ways. Hegemonic masculinity is not the only option out there; men all over the world articulate forms of masculinity which are different from and sometimes at odds with hegemonic masculinity. This includes, but is not limited to, masculinities of color, non-U.S. masculinities, gay, queer, and bisexual masculinities, feminine masculinities, working-class and poor masculinities, and non-Christian masculinities. Forms of masculinity are as numerous as there are men in the world.

When it comes to the transgender men in the films, they fall short of the standards of hegemonic masculinity. There are a variety of ways in which they do not “measure up” and are not part of nor do they expound hegemonic masculinity. By the fact of their falling short, they

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10 Connell, *Gender and Power*, 184.

11 Ibid.

12 Connell, *Masculinities*, 76.

are simultaneously performing, constructing, constituting, and articulating alternative masculinities. One of the most basic and primary ways in which they are not part of hegemonic masculinity is in the fact of their bodies. Transgender men are men who were not assigned at birth as male-bodied; they were assigned as female-bodied with female genitalia. Transgender men were not born with male genitalia, such as a penis and testicles. This, in the eyes of society and by a great many cisgender men and women, is viewed as essential for being a man and possessing masculinity.

In his article, “Part of the Package,” Jamison Green notes that, with the men he interviewed, “I asked whether masculinity depends on having a male body or on having a penis...the universal response was 'no.’”<sup>13</sup> This claim is corroborated in studies performed by Jason Cromwell and Andrew Forshee. They both found that transgender men do not view themselves as being any less of men simply because they were not born with male bodies or because they do not have a flesh penis.<sup>14</sup> This marks a clear distinction in the transgender men's minds between maleness and masculinity. A male body does not necessarily imply masculinity and masculinity does not necessarily follow only from a male body.

The fact that none of the transgender men in the films examined here have a penis does not seem to be any deterrent to them in their pursuit of sex and pleasure. In fact, one of them, Buck Angel, explicitly calls attention to the fact that he was not born with a flesh penis, calling himself on all of his websites and in all of his publications “Buck Angel: The Man with a Pussy.” In a broader view, the fact that this pornography exists at all calls attention to the transgender status of the men involved; I will further unpack these notions of visibility in the next chapter. The fact that none of these men were born with a penis does not prevent them in any way from

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13 Green, “Part of the Package,” 295.

14 Cromwell, *Transmen and FTMs*, 135; Forshee, “Perceptions of Masculinity among Transgender Men,” 95.



engaging in sexual interactions as men with other men and women. As the publication *Primed: The Back Pocket Guide for Transmen & the Men Who Dig Them* states, “...people assume we don't have cocks. Not only do some of us have surgeries that allow us to penetrate our partners with our genitals, but there are also other options like strap-ons, dildos and our hands that we use to fuck with too.”<sup>15</sup> The transgender men in the films, though none of them have had genital surgery, use all the other means mentioned here for penetration. They use strap-ons, dildos, and their hands to penetrate their partners and themselves, both anally and vaginally. The fact that they do not have flesh penises does not matter and is in no way a deterrent for them in any way.

The lack of a flesh penis is also important in how the pornography with transgender men functions in the broader realm of pornography in general. In both heterosexual and gay male pornography, two of the largest and most dominant, one might even say hegemonic, genres of pornography today, one of the most important aspects is the money shot, the visible orgasm and ejaculation of the man or men in the scene or scenes. Linda Williams claims that the money shot is one of the signals of the rise of the generic form of hard core pornography.<sup>16</sup> Though the transgender men sometimes have sex with cisgender men who do ejaculate for the camera, the transgender men, who are the focus of the film, never ejaculate on camera. There are instances in which they have orgasms and they signal this by saying they are going to have an orgasm or by moaning, panting, writhing, and making facial expressions. Though they appear to orgasm, the audience is unable to see it on screen in the same visceral way they are able to see a money shot. A particular passage from Williams seems salient here:

“The money shot could thus finally be viewed as that moment when the phallic male libidinal and material economy most falters, most reverts to an absolute and unitary standard of value. But the import of this statement should not be

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15 Gay/Bi/Queer Transmen Working Group, *Primed: the Back Pocket Guide for Transmen & the Men Who Dig Them* (Toronto: [www.queertransmen.org](http://www.queertransmen.org), 2007), 13.

16 Williams, *Hard Core*, 93.

that pornography is hopelessly and monolithically phallic; instead it should be that pornography is insistently phallic *in this particular way, at this particular time...*" (emphasis hers).<sup>17</sup>

If the money shot is "the moment when the phallic male libidinal and material economy most falters," what does it mean to have pornography and hard core sex scenes with no money shot whatsoever? I would argue that the pornography featuring transgender men that contains no money shots is in fact disrupting and subverting the phallic economy. The absence of a flesh penis and its substitution with strap-ons, dildos, and fingers shows that a flesh penis is not necessarily needed for men (and others) to give and receive pleasure. The films provide an alternative to the flesh penis, in many ways rendering it unnecessary. If they do not need a flesh penis to pleasure themselves and others, the question of whether a penis matters or not in the context of the pornographic films becomes irrelevant. The lack of the money shot also reinforces Williams' notion that pornography is not "hopelessly and monolithically phallic."

Though there is no doubt that the pornography starring transgender men is often phallic, in that they use phallic objects such as

dildos to give and receive pleasure, it is not phallic in the same sense as typical heterosexual and gay male pornography. First of all, dildos are detachable and interchangeable, whereas flesh penises are not. Next comes the question of whose pleasure the dildo or flesh penis is meant for. In



*Illustration 3: No flesh penis? No problem. Dex Hardlove penetrating Ian Sparks with a strap-on dildo in "Cubbyholes."*

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 117.

the case of the flesh penis, though the person being penetrated does get pleasure, the primary pleasure is derived by the person in possession of the flesh penis, the penetrator. With the dildo, the primary pleasure is on the part of the person being penetrated. Also, the dildo will not prematurely ejaculate and it can perform and function as long as the person on bottom desires. In one of the films, there is even an attempt on the part of an interviewer to search out some semblance of a money shot. In *Buck's Beaver*, during one of the interview segments that happens between each and every sex scene, the off-camera interviewer, when asking how Buck cums, asks him if he squirts, specifically referring to female ejaculation. Buck says that he does squirt a little bit sometimes, but not usually. He does not ejaculate in any of the sex scenes in which he participates. Even when the money shot is explicitly sought out, by an outsider (supposedly), it is still denied and refuted, verbally in this occasion. The lack of the money shot changes the dynamic of the pornography in question, as it resists and subverts the phallic economy of pleasure and proves that pornography is not monolithically phallic.

The importance of the issue of the non-importance of the flesh penis for transgender men, specifically those in the films, should not be understated. Traditionally and historically, in the “gender natural attitude” in Western societies, the flesh penis has been seen as the ultimate signifier of what it is to be a man (Kessler and McKenna, 113).<sup>18</sup> Many transgender people have disrupted this idea, demonstrating that gender identity does not necessarily have anything to do with genitals. These films are a particular strategy developed by certain transgender men that is addressed to this particular issue.<sup>19</sup> They are showing the audience and the general public that it is possible to be a man without a flesh penis. They are accomplishing this in one of the most explicit ways possible, by putting their naked bodies on display and still constructing and

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18 Suzanne J. Kessler and Wendy McKenna, *Gender: an Ethnomethodological Approach* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 113.

19 Thank you to Esther Newton for this insight.

constituting themselves as men, albeit men with alternative masculinities. They make it visually undeniable that it does not take a flesh penis to make a man.

Another important way in which the transgender men in the films do not perform or constitute hegemonic masculinity is in their sexuality, such as who they have sex with and what kinds of sex acts in which they engage. Hegemonic masculinity is staunchly heterosexual, leaving gay, bisexual, and queer men and their masculinity to the margins, subordinated, much of the time violently. None of the men in any of the films examined here are heterosexual. Buck Angel has sex with women, both transgender and cisgender, but he also has sex with men and explicitly identifies as bisexual. All of the other men in the films only have sex with other men on camera, both transgender and cisgender men. This is not what is generally expected of transgender men in the medico-physiological system. Jason Cromwell writes, “In most of the literature FTMs/transmen are allowed sexuality, albeit a very limited one in which a heterosexual paradigm prevails. They supposedly are attracted only to 'feminine, heterosexual women with no homosexual drives visible or present in history.’”<sup>20</sup> The reason for this assumption is the general heterosexist nature of our society, in which, if you identify as a man of any sort, transgender or cisgender, you are expected to be attracted to and want to have sex with women exclusively. The men in the films defy this in their desire for other men and their active sexual engagement with them. The settings of the films can also indicate alternative sexualities. One particular case is the film *Cubbyholes*, which is entirely filmed in a San Francisco gay sex club, Eros. The filming location of *Cubbyholes* and *Trannyfags*, San Francisco, helps to signify the films as sexually alternative, as San Francisco is known as a center of gay male culture. The marketing of the films often also distinguishes them as queer porn for a queer audience. The films are often sold on websites that also feature gay male, lesbian, bisexual, and/or queer

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20 Cromwell, *Transmen and FTMs*, 131.

pornography. One of the actors, Buck Angel, is the first transgender man to star in a film by a major mainstream gay porn studio, TitanMen. The film, entitled *Cirque Noir*, features all cisgender men, except for Buck; he is the sole exception and the revelation of his transgender status is positioned as the film's climax. In so many ways, these films and the actors in them are constituted as possessing a queer sexuality and sensibility.

The sexual acts that take place in the films, apart from simply being between men, also positions the men outside of hegemonic masculinity. The men in the films are penetrated and penetrate others both anally and vaginally. The occurrence of vaginal penetration contradicts accepted knowledge about transgender men. Jason Cromwell states that

“Within the narratives made available through the medico-physiological literature...both MTF and FTM transsexuals are disgusted by and hate their genitalia, and, by implication, sexual acts of any kind are considered equally disgusting and abhorrent. Some theorists go beyond making implications and state emphatically that “disgusted by their genitals, transsexuals masturbate rarely and indulge less in sexual relations with others.”<sup>21</sup>

The transgender men in the films explicitly defy this assumption about the sexuality of transgender men. They find pleasure in their bodies and others find their bodies desirable. The fact that many of the transgender men in the films enjoy and derive pleasure from vaginal penetration directly contradicts what Cromwell states has been the generally accepted thinking about transgender men. In their enjoyment of vaginal penetration, they are also positioning themselves far outside of hegemonic masculinity. Not only do they have genitalia designated as female, they do not hide it and they explicitly enjoy being penetrated. This is even alien to gay male masculinity, which is accepting of anal penetration, something that is also beyond the purview of hegemonic masculinity. Buck Angel, in one of his interview segments, states outright that he enjoys being vaginally penetrated by both men and women, by both flesh penises

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21 Ibid.

and dildos.

Other than vaginal penetration, the transgender men in the films engaged in other sexual practices that could be considered “deviant” by hegemonic masculinity. This is an important aspect of the films. The maker of *Cubbyholes*, Ken Rowe, when asked about the intended audience of the films, stated, “Our target audience is first the FTM community, to show a diversity of ways to have sex, a diversity of bodies, and general support for positive safe sexuality.”<sup>22</sup> They engage in the use of sex toys, such as strap-ons and dildos. The use of such instruments is “deviant” in that a hegemonic man would purport not to need the aid of outside instruments; he would say that his penis would be enough. The use of sex toys, however, renders the flesh penis, unnecessary, something that is potentially threatening to hegemonic masculinity. If one does not need the flesh penis, then one may not need the person who was assigned male at birth and who fulfills the role of the hegemonic man.

The men in the films also engage in S/M type sexual encounters. These role-playing scenes exaggerate, call attention to, and control power relationships for the purpose of pleasure on the part of both the top and the bottom. This is unacceptable to hegemonic masculinity, as the power that comes into play in sexual encounters is supposed to be implicit, not explicit. Also, it is often posited as being for the pleasure of the top (or man), not for the bottom (or woman). The vast majority of the sex that takes place in the films is also safer sex. The men in the films use all sorts of barriers, including latex gloves, condoms, and dental dams. This implies a knowledge about the existence and prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases. The typical hegemonic man does not need to worry about such diseases, because diseases are supposedly linked to queer communities, as in the case of HIV/AIDS. Also, many safer sex practices that are used in the films come directly out of gay male and lesbian communities, thus marking the

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<sup>22</sup> Ken Rowe, e-mail message to author, January 16, 2008.

actors and films as queer in their acknowledgment and management of the dangers of sexual encounters.

The body modifications of the transgender men in the films also marks them, most literally, as being outside of the bounds of hegemonic masculinity. Almost all of them have either tattoos or piercings of some sort. Buck Angel has many tattoos on his arms, hands, chest, stomach, and back. All of the performers in *Trannyfags* have tattoos and piercings, just to differing degrees. At least two of the performers have their earlobes pierced, whereas another one of them has two off-center and symmetrical lower lip piercings. In the film *Cubbyholes*, all of the transgender men, and some of the cisgender men, have either tattoos or piercings. One of the performers, Ian Foxe, has a vertical hood piercing, meaning that he has a piercing vertically through his clitoral hood. The presence of these visible body modifications, even more visible due to the fact that the performers are often naked, puts these men outside of hegemonic masculinity. The hegemonic man is unmarked; his skin is pure and clean, in its supposedly “natural” state. The men in the films are defying this dictum by intentionally marking their bodies. Some of the modifications have quite a striking effect. One of Buck Angel's tattoo is the word “Pervert” in large script over the top of his back and shoulder blades. This tattoo officially marks Buck as outside of the realm of acceptable and respectable sexuality and therefore outside of hegemonic masculinity. Ian Foxe's vertical hood piercing calls attention to the fact that he has a vagina and clitoris. In fact, he wants others to notice the piercing, as he complains to another performer when others do not notice it. The occurrence of these modifications on the performers' bodies mark them visually and ensure that they are not part of hegemonic masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity also has a class aspect. The hegemonic man is on top of the

economic ladder, in the upper-class. This would be reflected in what he wears and how he looks. Many of the transgender men in the films articulate a very different class presentation than that of hegemonic masculinity. Many of them exhibit a working class, or at least lower income, masculinity, specifically a White working class masculinity. Buck Angel seems to use this to his advantage the most. Once again, if one looks back at the very first interview segment of *Buck's Beaver* and looks at his attire, one is able to discern that he is articulating a particularly classed masculinity. He is wearing a white sleeveless A-shirt and camouflage cargo pants. The A-shirt is the most indicative here. The white sleeveless A-shirt is a distinct symbol of White working class masculinity. One indication of this is by another often used term for this type of shirt: “wifebeater.” This classist term came about because of stereotypical media representations of White working class men wearing it while they abused their spouses. By wearing it, whether Buck is working class or not, he is appropriating a particularly symbolic piece of clothing. His tattoos also mark him as working class, as tattooing historically in the United States has been seen as a working class practice, specifically a practice of working class White men.<sup>23</sup> By appropriating and using these symbols, Buck is constituting himself as a particular type of man. The working class man is often seen as physically strong, sexual, and particularly masculine, much of this due to working in manual labor positions. Buck is therefore positioning himself as physically powerful, overtly sexual, and as being very butch and masculine. By constructing himself this way, he is better able to play the dominant role in his sexual performances in his films.

As discussed earlier, the men in *Trannyfags* also articulate a particularly classed masculinity, albeit differently than Buck Angel. Their youth, body modifications, hair styles,

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23 Margo DeMello, *Bodies of Inscription: a Cultural History of the Modern Tattoo Community* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 59-62.



and clothing position them within the purview of an alternative masculinity that is also constructed as working class. Many of them maintain a sort of punk aesthetic by means of Billy Coyote's pink Mohawk and the body piercings and tattoos of him and the other transgender men. Also, as mentioned above, one of the actors, Joey Genoa, is supposedly under house arrest at his mother's house. By being under house arrest, this means that he must have committed some sort of crime that would warrant imprisonment. This makes him seem more working class due to the fact that working class men are vastly over-represented in the ranks of those who are caught up in the criminal justice system and the prison industrial complex. Also, the fact that he lives at his mother's house indicates that he is a young man of limited economic means and must live in an extended family situation. The class articulations of Buck Angel and the transgender men in *Trannyfags* allows them to claim and employ very specific notions of White working class masculinity, specifically those of physical strength and dominance (on the part of Buck Angel) and youthful rebelliousness (on the part of the men in *Trannyfags*).

Though the transgender men in the films do not measure up to the standards of hegemonic masculinity in a wide variety of aspects, they do in one respect. All of the transgender men in the films, with one exception, are White. Whiteness is central to hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is not simply gendered, classed, and sexualized, but it is also very distinctly racialized. As R.W. Connell puts it, "Race relations may also become an integral part of the dynamic between masculinities. In a white-supremacist context, black masculinities play symbolic roles for white gender construction."<sup>24</sup> I am not claiming that there are no people of color in any of the films; that is not the case. It is important, though, that almost none of the *transgender men* in the film are people of color. Only one, Hugo Salt in *Trannyfags*, is not White. By not including transgender men of color in the films, they are elided from the

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<sup>24</sup> Connell, *Masculinities*, 80.

picture. The masculinities articulated in the films, though in many ways alternative, are still solidly White masculinities. There does not seem to be any room for men of color in these constructions of alternative masculinities. By not representing transgender men of color, it is made to seem as if they are not there, as if they do not exist, when this is very much not the case.

In addition to there being only one transgender man of color, the people of color in the films who are not transgender men are racialized in a very particular fashion. In *Cubbyholes*, the final scene is between Mark Van Helsing, a very skinny White transgender man, and Marlo Davis, a large Black cisgender man. Another scene, this time in *Trannyfags*, takes place between Joey Genoa, a White transgender man, and an unnamed Black cisgender man. In both of these scenes, the Black cisgender men are the tops, the dominant actors in the sexual encounters. Once again, this positions transgender men as White without the possibility of transgender men of color. Something else that these scenes do is construct the Black men as sexually dominant and aggressive. This is a subtle form of racialization, in that it refers back to stereotypically racist notions of Black men as sexually powerful and dominating over Whites, both men and women. Though in this case it is used for the sexual pleasure of both partners involved, it is still present. This is not untypical of pornography as a whole. Black men, when featured, are generally portrayed as sexually aggressive and as having an over-the-top sexuality that cannot be satiated.

Another, more blatant case of racialization occurs in a scene in the film *Buck Fever*. The scene opens with Buck Angel sitting on a couch with Rod Barry, a White cisgender man. They are talking and smoking cigars and drinking beer. In walks Sierra Cassidy, a Black transgender woman, dressed in a pink miniskirt dress. Before they even begin to have sex, Sierra is explicitly racialized. While they are chatting, Rod says to Buck, “Look at that gorgeous Black

girl.” The two men are talking to each other *about* her but not *to* her. In this way they participate in her objectification. She is not to be engaged with in the conversation, only to be viewed and talked about. When they do begin to have sex, Sierra performs oral sex on Rod. During this act, he utters a variety of statements, including, “I like girls on their knees,” “You’re a nasty fucking girl, aren’t you?” and “Fucking look at me while you’re sucking my cock, you dirty bitch.” In these instances, Rod is verbally asserting his dominance over Sierra. Rod is a White cisgender man who is positioning himself as controlling and dominating Sierra, a Black transgender woman. Buck joins in by telling Sierra that she looks very



*Illustration 4: Sierra Cassidy performing oral sex on Rod Barry in “Buck Fever.” Buck Angel watches from the side; notice the cigar.*

submissive. When Sierra is vaginally penetrating Buck while still giving oral sex to Rod, Buck says, “That big Black cock feels so good,” and Rod says, “How’s that fucking big Black fucking dick feel in your pussy?” In many ways, this is typical of pornography as it exists today. People of color in pornography are treated in specific ways based on stereotypes concerning racialized sexuality. Black men, or any Black person who has a flesh penis, are characterized as having enormous genitals, thereby signaling sexual voracity and insatiability. That is what is happening in this particular scene. By being racialized from the beginning of the scene, Sierra is assumed to have a particular kind of sexuality, based in large part on the demands and assumptions of the White men who are in the scene. The way in which Rod treats Sierra is representative of the

ways in which women of color, especially transgender women of color are treated in our society on a day-to-day basis. White men see themselves as dominant over them and therefore they think that they may do with them as they wish, sexually and otherwise. By racializing Sierra in a particular way, Buck and Rod are constructing themselves in a specifically White masculine context. They are able to constitute their masculinity and manhood through their racialized engagement with Sierra.

### **Masculinity without the Male Body**

In her book *Female Masculinity*, Judith Halberstam discusses the fact of female masculinity, of masculinity that is performed and inhabited by female bodies and identities. One aspect of her project is the attempt to pry apart masculinity and maleness, to show that they are not one and the same. This is exemplified in the title of her introduction: “An Introduction to Female Masculinity: *Masculinity without Men*” (emphasis mine).<sup>25</sup> She claims that “female masculinity affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity.”<sup>26</sup> By showing how masculinity exists outside of the male body and that it is inhabited and performed quite successfully by female bodies, Halberstam does a superb job of exploring the truly constructed nature of masculinity itself. She also explicitly mentions transgender men by saying “transsexuality and transgenderism do afford unique opportunities to track explicit performances of non-dominant masculinity.”<sup>27</sup>

In my analysis of these films, I concur with Halberstam's statements concerning transgender masculinity. The films provide a way to look at alternative forms of masculinity. Also, there is the possibility that they could provide an alternative masculine articulation not just

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25 Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 1.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., 40.

for the general populations, but for transgender men in particular. I would argue that the men in the films are articulating, constructing, constituting, and performing a variety of queer transmasculinities. They are proving that masculinity need not be tied to male bodies. They are also providing new masculinities for others to emulate. These new masculinities are, for the most part, outside the bounds of traditional hegemonic masculinity. They expand the notions of what is masculine and what is not, who is a man and who is not. They also show that transgender men can be and are sexual with a wide variety of people, contrary to popular belief. It is important to note, however, that, though these transmasculinities being articulated in the films are resistant to hegemonic masculinity in many, they are not entirely non-complicit. The absence of transgender men of color and the racialization of the people of color in the films who are not transgender men indicates that these transgender masculinities are still implicitly White and that they are complicit in the Whiteness of hegemonic masculinity.

That being said, I would still argue that the masculinities performed in the films are a new way to view transgender men and masculinity in general. These are transgender men taking their genders and sexualities into their own hands and coming up with new and interesting ways to express them. Jason Cromwell claims that transgender people are finally beginning to articulate their own “transsubjectivities” in “transsituated discourses” of their own making.<sup>28</sup> I would argue that that is exactly what is happening in these films. Transgender men are creating and articulating their own discourses and therefore their own particular subjectivities. Instead of letting an outside force, whether that be the medical establishment or the legal system, define who they are, they are defining themselves on their own terms. Their use of such as sexually explicit medium as hard core pornography aims to prove that transgender men are sexual beings with their own agency in the creation of their gender and sexuality. In the end, these new

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28 Cromwell, *Transmen and FTMs*, 25.

constructions of gender and sexuality are potentially liberating sites for transgender men and those who desire them.

### **Chapter Three: Surprise, Confession, and Dilemmas of Visibility**

Hard core pornography is one of the more visual means of expression in the cultural milieu today. Not only is it visual in the sense that it is generally recorded on some sort of video or DVD format, but it is also one of the most explicit forms of expression, in that it gives to the audience every square inch of the performers' bodies and every movement of the sex acts they perform. The fact of transgender men acting in hard core pornography presents a number of important issues and problems, especially with the fact that transgender people have historically been regarded as having bodies that should not be seen in Western societies. Transgender people are expected to “pass” as cisgender people so as not to be noticed (Cromwell, 38-39).<sup>1</sup> The men in the films do not pass in the least, as they are revealing their transgender status for all the world to see. In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which transgender men reveal their transgender status in the films and why it might be different in different movies. From there, I will examine this “revelation” through Foucault's notion of the confession, after which I place it within the dilemma of transgender visibility.

#### **Surprise! He's Transgender**

Once again, I begin with the opening scene of the film *Buck's Beaver*. Previously I discussed the ways in which Buck constructs and performs his masculinity in the very beginning of the film. Now I would like to shift the focus a bit, shift it to what else this scene is really about. This scene is also about revelation and the element of surprise. During the interview, the off-camera interviewer asks Buck what is so special about his pornographic films that sets them apart from all of the other pornography that is out there. Buck replies, “Well, I'm a very special

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<sup>1</sup> Cromwell, *Transmen and FTMs*, 38-39.

man. I'm Buck Angel, the man with a pussy, and there is no other porn star like me in the adult business today." The interviewer reacts with disbelief, saying that he cannot imagine that such a masculine person as Buck Angel could have female genitalia. Buck replies that he is "100% man" and that he does not mind proving that he has female genitalia through the act of showing. The interviewer says that he would like to see it, at which point Buck stands up and pulls down his pants and underwear to reveal that he indeed possesses female genitals. He describes his genitals by saying, "It's a big monster pussy." The interviewer is stunned by this revelation and seems to be unable to believe what is right before his very eyes. The interviewer goes so far as to ask, "Is that a real pussy?" He also inquires as to whether or not Buck has had any surgical intervention to construct his female genitals.

Though this may be one of the initial instances in which Buck Angel uses his transgender status as a surprise, as a turning point in the pornographic narrative, it is by no means the last.

The sense of surprise is, of course, purely theatrical. Anyone picking up one of his films cannot help but notice the fact that Buck is different from other male-identified porn stars. On the cover of the box for *Buck's Beaver*, the taglines include "Buck Angel: the Man with a PUSSY," "The First FTM Porno Movie," and "FTM Porn—Female to Male Transsexual Porn." On the



*Illustration 1: Shock and awe: Logan Steele stares at Buck Angel after his dildo slips off in "Cirque Noir."*

cover of *Buck Fever*, made over a year later, the tagline reads "The Man without a Dick Rides Again!" There is an important distinction here between "the man with a pussy" and "the man



without a dick.” One implies lack while the other does not.

In each scene in both *Buck's Beaver* and *Buck Fever* in which there is some sort of narrative and not just sex, the use of the elements of surprise and deception occur regarding Buck's status as a transgender man. In the prison role-playing scene Buck performs the part of the prison guard while Jeff Cambell plays the part of the prisoner. Throughout much of the scene, as Buck has Jeff perform oral sex on him and as he anally penetrates Jeff, Buck places his dildo in the same position as a flesh penis; he has it sticking partway out of the top of his pants so that one cannot see the base. Though it is a realistic looking dildo, it is still a dildo nonetheless. During high-angle shots, the audience is even able to catch a glimpse of the base of the dildo. The whole time, however, Buck is supposedly fooling Jeff into thinking that he has a flesh penis and that he is a cisgender man. As he is anally penetrating Jeff, Buck slowly moves away from the dildo as he continues the penetration. He then sets the dildo on the table and makes Jeff sit in front of him. When Jeff removes Buck's underwear, he is visibly shocked to see that Buck does not have a flesh penis. Buck replies to Jeff's astonishment with “What the fuck's your problem? You never seen a man-pussy before?” They then masturbate together, after which Buck performs oral sex on Jeff. The scene ends with Jeff vaginally penetrating Buck. The unveiling of Buck's transgender status coincides with Buck going from the top in the sexual encounter to being the bottom.

In the same film, the last scene is between Buck and Lena Ramon, a cisgender woman. She poses as a call girl whom Buck has hired. When she arrives, Buck makes her perform oral sex on him, specifically on his dildo. Once again, he has the dildo sticking out of his pants, this time out of the fly. She then undresses and lowers herself onto Buck's dildo to be vaginally penetrated. As she is riding him, he says, “Did they tell you about the little surprise?” He says

that he told “them,” presumably the agency that sent Lena, about his surprise. She thinks that he means that he has another person there with him and she says, “I don't do anything freaky.” Buck then stands up, unbuttons his pants, takes out the dildo, and pulls down his underwear, to which Lena shouts, “Holy shit!” and “I don't know what to do with this!” She says that she is confused and is in a continuous state of astonishment. When he asks her if she liked that “big cock,” his dildo, she responds affirmatively and says that she “thought it tasted funny.” The scene continues with various sex acts, including oral sex on both Lena and Buck and vaginal penetration with dildos, specifically a double-headed dildo which they both use to penetrate each other at the same time.

This element of shock and surprise is not limited to a single film; Buck Angel also employs it in his film *Buck Fever*. In his scene with Sierra Cassidy and Rod Barry, Buck not only utilizes the element of surprise with regards to his status as a transgender man, but also with regards to his identity as bisexual. He reveals that he is bisexual when he states that he would like to have Sierra “fuck” him. Rod responds with, “You never told me that shit.” He does not become angry, as that would not be in tune with the scene. As Sierra kneels in front of Rod, Buck says, “I'm a special guy,” to which Sierra replies, “Really? What's special about you?” Buck then says, in reference to Rod, “I don't know if my homeboy here knows about my special treat.” Buck sets up the prospect of his revelation for the other performers and for the audience. He asks Sierra if there is something special about her as well, to which she replies affirmatively, saying that she has “something extra.” She says that she has a “swollen clit,” and Buck replies that he does as well. Buck pulls down his pants and begins to masturbate. Sierra reacts with mild surprise and Rod says, “What the fuck?!” Buck asks, “Have you ever seen a guy with a pussy before?” Both Rod and Sierra respond that they have not. That is the last of the

discussion before the rest of the scene is devoted entirely to sex.

In another scene in *Buck Fever*, Buck is not the only one who uses surprise as a central narrative device. Wendy Williams, a transgender woman, surprises Buck first. When they are sitting on a couch together, Buck begins to rub Wendy's clothed crotch and says, "Wow, you have a fat pussy." She responds with, "Well, there's something I think you should see," at which point she begins to undress. She reaches into her pants and pulls out her penis for glimpse, to

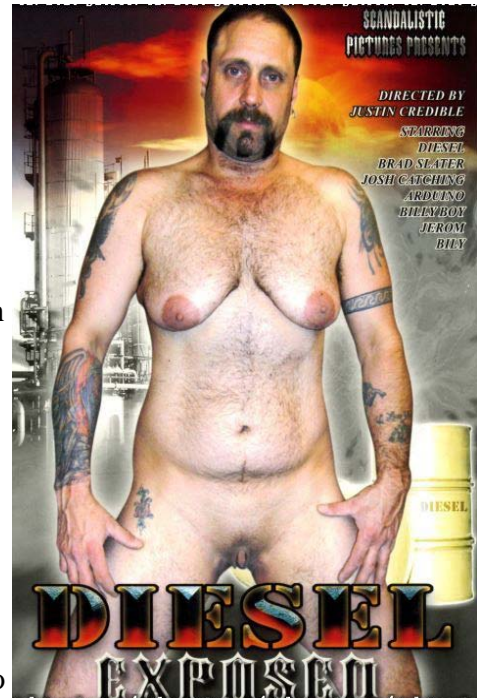


Illustration 2: Cover of "Diesel Exposed."

which Buck exclaims, "What's that?" She says that he'll have to come closer to find out. She finishes undressing down to her underwear, which is when she lays back and pulls her penis out. Buck, in surprise, says, "No way! You have a cock?" When she asks if he thinks it will work in his video, he says, "That's even better! I love chicks with dicks! Way better than fucking chicks with pussies." The focus, for a good amount of time, goes to Wendy's penis. The scene continues with Buck performing oral sex on Wendy, Wendy performing oral sex on Buck's dildo (once again pulled through his fly), Wendy anally penetrating herself with a dildo, and with Buck anally penetrating Wendy with his dildo through his pants. As he does this, he jostles the dildo out of his pants and it falls on the floor. Wendy immediately says, "What just happened?" Buck begins to laugh and says, "I forgot to tell you. You know who I am? I'm Buck Angel, the man with a pussy!" They both laugh. The scene then proceeds with Wendy vaginally penetrating Buck. Throughout the rest of the scene, they use words like "man-pussy," "she-cock," and "lady-cock" to describe their

genitals.

Buck Angel is not the only transgender man porn star to utilize the notion of surprise and deception in his films. The performer Diesel also uses the element of surprise to great effect. The very title of his film, *Diesel Exposed*, implies that he has a secret to share, something that is able to be exposed to the viewer and anyone else. Once again, as with Buck Angel, the viewer is under no illusions; the audience knows that Diesel is a transgender man. The cover of the film is a photograph of Diesel naked, in which one is able to see Diesel's breasts and female genitals. During the scenes in the film, Diesel appears with a Master and his Slave, both of whom are cisgender men. As they are tying up the slave, a scrolling marquee at the bottom of the screen states, "This Master & his slave have no clue Diesel was born a woman, but they will..." This sets up for the viewer a sense of dramatic irony. The audience knows something that some of the performers do not. This "something," Diesel's transgender status, is important in pornographic film, as porn revolves around notions of gender, sexuality, and genitals, all of which are wrapped up in concepts of transgender identity.

As the scene progresses, Diesel, the Master, and the Slave perform various sex acts in various positions. One noticeable feature is that, in all of the configurations, Diesel is always a top. He never bottoms and is never penetrated in the scene. He penetrates both of the others at various points with a dildo sticking out of his underpants, much in the same way as Buck Angel, though Diesel uses a harness whereas Buck Angel does not. At the end of the scene, after both the Master and the Slave have cum, Diesel says, "I gotta tell you guys something. I hope you won't be offended." He points to the Master and says, "You've already heard of females-to-males, right? He hasn't. I had something to tell you, but I had to wait 'til all the fun was over!" As Diesel says this, he unbuttons and takes off his leather vest, revealing his large breasts. He

says, "I am female-to-male," and proceeds to remove his underwear and dildo. The Slave and the Master both respond positively, saying that the fact that Diesel is transgender is "hot." The slave says, "That's a good reason to use the strap-on," and, "That's surprising." Diesel asks if they would film with him again and they both respond affirmatively. The Slave asks jokingly, "Would you wear two earrings next time?" Diesel responds, "As long as you promise to not want to dress me up in drag." When the Slave looks confused, Diesel says, "Drag as in dress." Here Diesel reinforces himself as a man, in that wearing a dress would be a form of drag for him.

Diesel uses his status as transgender to surprise and shock sexual partners in other scenes in *Diesel Exposed*. Each time he waits until the end, after everyone else has cum, to reveal his "secret." Another scene positions him as the dominant over another Billy, a cisgender man, who acts as the submissive. At the end of the scene, with the other man straddling him, another scrolling marquee comes across the bottom of the screen which reads, "Diesel will now reveal who he really is for Billy for the first time..." As this rolls, Diesel tells Billy not to go anywhere, that he has to show him something. He even asks, "Are you ready for this?" He then opens his vest, reveals his breasts, and says, "I am female-to-male. I was born female, transitioning to male; I'm transgender." Billy asks, "Are you really?" to which Diesel responds, "That's the surprise at the end of the video." When Billy climbs off, Diesel takes off his strap-on with Billy gaping open-mouthed. Diesel says, "Welcome to Diesel's world! First time for everybody." Billy continues to be surprised, though he does say that he had a good time. They both compare the experience to Candid Camera. Diesel says, "You would have never known," to which Billy agrees that he would not have.

In the film's last scene, Diesel is with two younger men who have sex with each other, both oral and anal. Other than some kissing, body contact, and a bit of anal fingering, Diesel is

not directly involved in the sex in the scene. Instead, he functions as more of a director and observer. The end of the scene has the two men masturbating onto Diesel's chest. After they have cum, he tells them that he has a secret, that he was “born a woman.” Neither of them believe him until he takes off his underwear, then they are both completely surprised. Diesel says, “A little freaky, huh?” to which the other men says, “No offense or nothing, but yeah. I've never seen that before.” Diesel says, “Welcome to the new world,” and another reference is made to *Candid Camera*. Diesel then talks about another porn star, saying, “You ever heard of Buck Angel? Well, I'm his competition, and I'm gonna blow him away.” It is then revealed that one of the other two men knew about Diesel's transgender status beforehand and is only “acting” surprised, whereas the surprise of the other man is supposedly genuine and authentic.

Interestingly enough, the element of surprise does not occur in *all* of the pornographic films featuring transgender men. In both *Trannyfags* and *Cubbyholes*, everyone seems to already know who is transgender and who is not. If they do not know, it does not seem to matter. There is no shock and no surprise. It's not as if the surprise in the scenes with Buck Angel and Diesel impedes the sex that occurs or the pleasure of the participants, but in *Trannyfags* and *Cubbyholes*, it simply is not there. It seems as if there is a categorical difference between the films that employ surprise and the films that do not. In the films that use surprise as a narrative device, there is a single transgender man as the star, either Buck Angel or Diesel. They claim the entire spotlight as the main attraction of the films. There are not even any other



*Illustration 3: Many transgender men in "Trannyfags." From left: Billy Coyote, Joey Genoa, Hugo Salt, and Mark van Helsing.*

transgender men in the films, just them. Buck Angel, in the opening interview scene of *Buck's Beaver*, claims that there is not another porn star out there like him. In *Trannyfags* and *Cubbyholes*, however, there are numerous transgender men having sex with each other and, in some cases, with cisgender men.

I would suggest that this aspect of the films, whether or not the focus is on a single transgender man as the star or on a plethora of transgender men, has an impact on whether or not the element of surprise plays a prominent role in the film. Part of this stems from the way in which Buck Angel positions himself as the first, the one, and the only transgender man porn star out there. He does this in the first interview segment of *Buck's Beaver*. He has also said this in print and online interviews, such as his interview with the weblog *Queerty*, in which he stated, “I am the first--and still the only--FTM porn star” (Belonsky).<sup>2</sup> This statement is not entirely true on the accounts of him being both the first and the only FTM porn star. He may be the most famous and well known, due in no small part to self-promotion, but he is neither the first nor the only. He himself disproves this claim on one of his websites in which he lists several pornographic films that feature transgender men (“Buck Angel's FTM Tranny Porn video site”).<sup>3</sup> On this site, he advertises a number of films starring Chance Ryder, who is alternately labeled a transgender man and an intersex man, though Buck specifically labels his films as being “FTM porn.” Ryder's films dates back to the early 1990's, well before Buck Angel ever began making his films.<sup>4</sup> On the same website where Buck acknowledges Ryder as his predecessor, he simultaneously undermines Ryder's accomplishments by saying, “...this is a must see for those into a genre that wasn't around until I started it!” He still claims the mantle of being the first.

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2 Andrew Belonsky, “Queerty Query: Buck Angel,” Weblog entry on Queerty posted February 21, 2006, <http://www.queerty.com/queer/queerty-query/queerty-query-buck-angel-20060221.php>.

3 “Buck Angel's FTM Tranny Porn video site,” <http://www.ftmporn.com/main.html>.

4 Ellen Thompson, “Interview with Buck Angel: Transexual-Man,” *Buttman*, 2006, 60.

When it comes to being the only transgender man porn star out there, he could not be further from the truth. The fact that I am examining a number of films in which he does not star proves this. Also, on the website mentioned earlier, he has a long list of pornographic films starring transgender men who are not him. It cannot be said that one must take into account when the quote cited earlier was made. His interview with *Queerty* was in 2006. By that time, *Trannyfags* had already been made in 2004. Buck's elision of other films starring transgender men serves to position him as someone particular and someone absolutely unique, a commodity that no one else offers. By doing so, he attempts to claim an entire genre for himself, therefore ensuring a captive audience. Captive audiences, of course, mean that Buck has a constant flow of income. By constantly stating and promoting that he is the first and only transgender man porn star in the adult film industry, he creates a particular discourse that leaves out other transgender men acting in pornographic films.

Diesel has a different rhetoric than does Buck Angel. Diesel openly acknowledges that he is not the only transgender man in the adult entertainment industry. In fact, during his film *Diesel Exposed*, he explicitly mentions Buck Angel, saying that he is similar in that they are both transgender men. He also mentions Buck Angel to position himself as his rival. He says that "I'm his competition, and I'm gonna blow him away." He constructs himself as an upstart, aiming to claim the mantle of transgender man porn star from Buck Angel, who apparently hoards it so effectively. He is still, however, constructing himself in a similar fashion as Buck Angel. They both see themselves and claim to be stars, to be the center of all of the attention of the films, and, in their respective films, they most certainly are. This is different from *Trannyfags* and *Cubbyholes*, in which no one person occupies a starring role. To keep the center stage, one must perform certain acts that keep one at the center of attention. I believe that this



may be a part of what is happening with the use of the element of surprise by Buck Angel and Diesel. By employing the element of surprise, they are constantly and continually constituting and re-constituting themselves as brand new, as never before seen. For someone to be surprised by the fact that they are transgender men, that someone must never have seen them before, even though they proclaim their transgender status loudly on all of their films, productions, websites, and interviews. The constant surprise becomes the constant spectacle. A constant spectacle must constantly be looked at by an audience, otherwise it is no longer a spectacle.

The other films, *Trannyfags* and *Cubbyholes*, and the transgender men who act in them do not present themselves as such. The films are not proposed as vehicles for stardom. The reasons for the films vary. Ken Rowe, the maker of *Cubbyholes*, says that his intention was “to develop new projects that would be consistent with EROS's [gay sex club that Rowe manages in San Francisco from which the money for *Cubbyholes* came] mission to teach safe sex practices within the gay community...We wanted to make porn that was educational but also served underrepresented communities.”<sup>5</sup> He also states that he is not in it for the money and has a lot of experience with non-profit ventures. When asked why he makes the sort of films that he does, Morty Diamond, the maker of *Trannyfags*, states, “I make transgender porn because there is still so little good quality non-degrading trans pornography out there.”<sup>6</sup> By focusing not on stardom, but instead on other issues, such as education and potential empowerment (i.e. non-degrading transgender pornography), Rowe and Diamond leave room for more than one central player. Also, with their stated intended audiences being transgender people, there would be less titillation in the prospect of the element of surprise surrounding transgender identity.

This issue of audience is similar to an observation made by Esther Newton in her work

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<sup>5</sup> Ken Rowe, e-mail message to author, January 18, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Morty Diamond, e-mail message to author, January 14, 2008.

*Mother Camp*. She observed that in strip teases done by drag queens for straight audiences, they would pull off the bra at the end, to surprise the audience with a flat chest.<sup>7</sup> For gay audiences, who already knew that the performer was a drag queen, they would not do this. As stated above, *Trannyfags* and *Cubbyholes*, the films lacking the element of surprise, are said by their makers to be directed toward transgender people. This may not be the case with Buck Angel and Diesel's films; oftentimes, they are sold on websites alongside porn featuring and marketed toward gay cisgender men. The fact of different intended audiences could have an impact on whether or not the element of surprise is deployed. This qualitative difference in the reasons for making films and the number of transgender men in the films seems to have a palpable effect on whether or not the element of surprise is employed as a narrative device.

### **Transgender Pornography and Confession**

I would contend that, not only does the surprise exist in the films, and not only do certain factors determine whether or not that surprise is present, but that the surprise also serves certain functions in the film, for the actors themselves, and for the viewing audience. Michel Foucault's theorizations of confession and knowledge production are especially helpful when considering the topics of surprise in the films and the purpose and function of the films themselves. Foucault claims that, "The confession became one of the West's most highly valued techniques for producing truth. We have since become a singularly confessing society."<sup>8</sup> He extends this notion of confession to all parts of society, including "justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most

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7 Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 45.

8 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: an Introduction* (New York: Random House, 1978), 59.

solemn rites.”<sup>9</sup> He includes media within this imperative toward confession in Western civilization, saying that we have come into “a literature ordered according to the infinite task of extracting from the depths of oneself, in between the words, a truth which the very form of the confession holds out like a shimmering mirage.”<sup>10</sup> In this instance, I am taking “literature” to mean something more broad than the tradition notion of literature as writing. I am using “literature” in the expanded sense of media in general, including film. Foucault contends that, stemming originally from religious confessions, the concept of confession has become one of the major modes in Western society for producing truth, especially about oneself.

Since he makes these theorizations in his book *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: an Introduction*, it would make sense that he connects confession to sex and sexuality. Foucault states, “From the Christian penance to the present day, sex was a privileged theme of confession. A thing that was hidden, we are told.”<sup>11</sup> According to Foucault, sexuality is something that is hidden and which must be confessed. The confession “is a technique for exercising power over the pleasures that we seem to be so 'free' to confess.”<sup>12</sup> This exercise of power is integral to the production of truth and knowledge concerning that which is confessed; in this case, sexuality.

Linda Williams brings hard core pornography into the mix of the confession and the production of knowledge about sexuality. Citing the feminist art and film critic Gertrud Koch, Williams says that “all film pornography is a 'drive for knowledge'...film pornography can be viewed as an important mechanism in the wholesale restructuring of the experience of sexuality into a visual form.”<sup>13</sup> In her chapter on the money shot, Williams states that “the ultimate goal of the rest of this book is to determine how feature-length hard core 'speaks' of sex...the goal here

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9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., 61.

12 Williams, *Hard Core*, 35.

13 Ibid., 48.

is to determine how best to understand both the form and content of this most prevalent device [i.e. the money shot] of the new hard-core film's attempt to capture an involuntary confession of pleasure.”<sup>14</sup> Hard core pornography, in its intensely visual nature, attempts to make visible that which is traditionally invisible, such as sexual pleasure, particularly *female* sexual pleasure, though it is the evidence of female sexual pleasure that remains difficult to capture:

In contrast to mainstream fictional narrative and soft-core indiscretion, hard core tries *not* to play peekaboo with either its male or female bodies. It obsessively seeks knowledge, through voyeuristic record of confessional, involuntary paroxysm, of the “thing” itself.

The irony, however, is that, while it is possible, in a certain limited and reductive way, to “represent” the physical pleasure of the male by showing erection and ejaculation, this maximum visibility proves elusive in the parallel confession of female sexual pleasure. Anatomically, female orgasm takes place...in an “invisible place” that cannot be easily seen.<sup>15</sup>

This focus of hard core pornography on the need to make visible female sexual pleasure has direct implications for the films I am examining. The sexual pleasure of the transgender men in the films is also elusive and is not readily seen as, though they are men, they are equipped with female genitals.

The films that I am examining, namely hard core pornography featuring transgender men, are also situated within this discourse of confession and knowledge production. One reason for this is because, if I am to follow Williams, all hard core pornography, including that which stars transgender men, is part of the confession of sexuality. I would also contend that the pervasive use of the element of surprise and shock in a number of the films fits in squarely with the discourse of the confession. Every time that either Buck Angel or Diesel surprises one of their co-stars, they are, in effect, coming out as transgender. Every surprise, every coming out, is a confession. They are confessing their status as transgender men. They confess it verbally by

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 49.

telling their partners that they are transgender, though they may not use that exact word. More importantly, they confess it visually, by exposing their genitals and, in Diesel's case, breasts. In Buck Angel's case, not only does he confess the fact that he is transgender by surprising his sexual partners, he also does so by surprising his interviewer. He also goes further than simply confessing his transgender status to the interviewer. He also answers questions about his transition, about his sexuality, about his genitals, even about how he has an orgasm. Buck Angel even confesses in writing before one even sees a film of him. As stated above, on his websites, on the covers of his films, and in a multitude of interviews, Buck proclaims himself as “the man with a pussy.”

This does not mean that the other transgender men, those in the films *Trannyfags* and *Cubbyholes*, are not engaged in confession. They are still confessing simply because they are putting their bodies and sexualities on display for the camera, even if it is in a non-sensational manner. I would argue, however, that in the cases of Buck Angel and Diesel, not only are they confessing, but they are constantly confessing. This compulsive confession seems to serve them well, as they use it at every turn, always coming out in almost every scene in which they star. Whereas in *Trannyfags* and *Cubbyholes*, no one is shocked or surprised by the fact that the men are transgender, seemingly *everyone* whom Buck Angel and Diesel come out to are floored by this information. Not too floored, however, to disrupt the flow and purpose of the scene. Though they may be momentarily stunned, the sex continues missing nary a beat. The surprise of the other performers seems to be quickly transformed into a type of desire, perhaps a desire for the unknown and the different.

If one concludes that the transgender men in the pornographic films are engaging in confession, then by confessing they are producing knowledge. What kind of knowledge are they

producing? I would contend that they are producing knowledge, not only about their own bodies, transgender status, and sexualities, but also knowledge about transgender men in general, such as what the bodies of transgender men look like and the possibilities for transgender men's sexualities. This does not, however, mean that they are spokespeople for all transgender people, much less all transgender men. They are, though, by far, the most visible when it comes to issues of the sexuality and bodies of transgender men. This visibility and confession, as stated above, produces a certain kind of knowledge, whether the performers or the audience want it to or not. There are other means by which to produce knowledge about the experiences of transgender men. One small example is the essay by Patrick Califia entitled "Manliness" in which he describes his own personal transition and what being a transgender man means to him.<sup>16</sup> This article is but one small portion of the larger genre of transgender autobiography, including those by transgender men. I do not want to delve into the genre too much here, but suffice to say that these books and articles, by telling intensely personal stories of self-transformation and identity development, most certainly also act as confessions of transgender identity, thus producing knowledge about said transgender identity. The films, in a similar vein, are also producing knowledge via confession. I would argue that the visibility of the transgender men on screen is part of what Linda Williams terms the "frenzy of the visible," which is a "logical outcome of a variety of discourses of sexuality that converge in, and help further to produce technologies of the visible."<sup>17</sup>

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16 Califia, "Manliness," 434.

17 Williams, *Hard Core*, 36.

One type of knowledge that these films produce is the knowledge of what a transgender man's body looks like. Many people do not even know that transgender men exist, much less what their bodies might look like. The films, whether intentionally or not, create an authoritative knowledge about what transgender men's bodies look like for many who watch the films. If someone who does not know, has never (knowingly) seen, or read about transgender men were to watch one of the films, they would be exposed in a very explicit way to the entirety of the bodies of certain transgender men. This exposure might lead them to believe that that is what all transgender men look like, even though this is most certainly not the actual case. Even among the films, there is a diversity of representations among the transgender men. Some of the men have had chest surgery, some of them have not. Some of the men have body modifications, such as tattoos and piercings, and some of them do not. My main point is that, although there is a diversity among the transgender men on film, and although the transgender men in the films in no way represent what all transgender men look like, they are still producing a certain knowledge about the bodies of transgender men.

One of the other primary knowledges that the confession of these films produce concerns sexuality. Specifically, they inform what sexualities are possible for transgender men to inhabit, identify with, and enjoy. As I



*Illustration 4: Alternative sexual practices: Buck Angel fisting Logan Steele and Tober Brandt in "Cirque Noir."*

cited above, Jason Cromwell describes how transgender men have traditionally been assumed to not want to be sexual, to hate their bodies. When they are allowed to have sexuality, it is

assumed to be strict heterosexuality. They are only supposed to be attracted to feminine cisgender women. This is definitely not the case in the real world, where transgender men's sexualities are just as various as anyone else's. One small piece of evidence to this effect is the existence of the publication *Primed: the Back Pocket Guide for Transmen & the Men Who Dig Them*, a guide for queer transgender men and those men who are interested in them. The films examined here take the assumption of either non-sexuality or strict heterosexuality on the part of transgender men and blow it apart. They show transgender men getting pleasure from their bodies, no matter what they may look like or what their transition status may be. The men in the films also show that transgender men are capable of something other than heterosexuality. None of the men in the films are heterosexual; they are all gay, bisexual, queer, or some sort of other alternative sexuality. Not many other types of pornography are as blatantly bisexual as that of Buck Angel. Straight porn is typically between a cisgender man and a cisgender woman and gay porn is typically between either between two or more cisgender men or two or more cisgender women. They also engage in alternative sexual practices, such as S/M, role-playing, watersports, and fisting. As Geoffrey Bateman states, in the films “transmen fuck and suck each other and biologically-born [cisgender] men as well, thus challenging stereotypical assumptions about what FTMs can do in bed and in public sex environments.”<sup>18</sup> By showing what transgender men are actually capable of sexually, the men in the films and the films themselves are questioning and unsettling stereotypes. This knowledge production can be helpful for a variety of reasons. For one, it shows the general public that transgender men are sexually diverse and are not a homogeneous group in this respect. It also shows transgender men as being desirable, which might open up new options for people who would have never considered transgender men viable sex or relationship partners. The biggest impact this knowledge production has is probably upon

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18 Bateman, “Pornographic Film and Video: Transsexual,” 1.



transgender men themselves. For one, it shows transgender people as being sexual agents. It also shows that transgender men need not conform to a single type of sexual expression. This could be potentially empowering to transgender men who may have alternative desires or who may wish to engage in alternative sexual practices. By seeing other transgender men doing the same, they might realize that it is possible for them as well, thus opening up new sexual vistas previously only imagined or, perhaps, even unimaginable.

### **The Dilemma of Transgender Visibility**

The discourse of confession and knowledge production in the pornographic films featuring transgender men is also wrapped up in and has implications for what Jamison Green has termed “the visibility dilemma for transsexual men” and what I have paraphrased as the dilemma of transgender visibility.<sup>19</sup> As the description of his article states, the “‘visibility dilemma’ [is] experienced by many transsexual men. Transsexual experience becomes invisible...in direct proportion to the success of appearing to others as a member of one's subjectively experienced gender; conversely, to the extent that one reveals a transsexual life course to others, one risks undermining the achieved gender status.”<sup>20</sup> The more one hides one's status as transgender, the better one “succeeds” at their self-identified gender. The more one identifies as transgender, the less one “succeeds” in this manner. He goes on in the article to describe personal trials and tribulations navigating the visibility dilemma in his own life. He talks about interviews he has done and his interactions with others and how it has all been impacted by how out he is about being transgender.

The pornographic films featuring transgender men most definitely play a role in the

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19 Green, “Look! No, Don't! The Visibility Dilemma for Transsexual Men,” 499.

20 Ibid.

dilemma of transgender visibility. One way in which this is fairly obvious is in the fact that the form in which these transgender men are expressing themselves, hard core pornography, is a distinctly and intensely visual and visible medium. I would even venture so far as to say that pornography is a hyper-visible medium. In terms of the bodies of those who are featured in hard core pornography, nothing is left to the imagination; everything that can be exposed is exposed. That which in our culture is supposed to be kept behind closed doors, namely explicit sexual encounters, is not only filmed, but put on display for anyone to see. All one needs is a computer and internet access to view these films starring transgender men. If one lives in a city that has a store that might carry the films, then all one needs is a television and a DVD player. This means that, no matter what their intended audiences, the transgender men in the films are confessing and are visible for the world to see and interpret as they will.

Some of the makers of the films directly address notions of transgender visibility in their explanations of their reasoning behind making the types of films that they do. As mentioned above, Morty Diamond makes transgender pornography because there is so little in the way of good quality, non-degrading transgender porn. Buck Angel states in an interview, “Eventually I realized that, while there was tons of MTF/shemale porn, there wasn't ANY FTM porn. I thought someone needed to step up to the plate, and I decided I was the man for the job.”<sup>21</sup> They both specifically cite what they see as a visibility deficit in the sexual representations of transgender men as significant reasons for why they do what they do.

This extreme visibility, however, does come with a price. Buck Angel has acknowledged this in interviews. As the transgender man porn star who is, by far, the most prolific and who is the most shamelessly self-promoting, he would know. Not only has he done his films, he has also done print interviews, radio interviews (a particularly notable one with Howard Stern), and

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<sup>21</sup> Belonsky, “Queerty Query: Buck Angel.”

television interviews, such as when he appeared on *The Maury Povich Show*. Buck has talked about how he is not offended by any question, saying in an interview “You must realize, it was I who put my own self out there. I put my life and my pussy, on the Internet. Never could I ever imply that you'd be getting too personal with your questions. Therefore, I have to deal with the questions, and whether or not people like and/or accept me” (Thompson, 60).<sup>22</sup> He has also talked about the price he has to pay from the broader community of transgender men. Not everyone agrees with what he is doing, and some have written him hate mail regarding it. Other people, transgender men and not, finally seeing a transgender man in porn, expect him to represent all transgender men. The introduction to his interview in the sex worker magazine *Spread* reads:

A few years ago, I saw Buck speak on a panel about porn, and people really wanted him to be an activist supreme, speaker of the Transman Voice—but he resisted this call-to-arms with stoicism. He stuck to his guns and was adamant that he was making porn, not creating a political movement. However, it seems that more recently Buck has been put to the test, and he has, a little reluctantly, begun to embrace his position as a cultural icon in the realm of sexual politics, though he is still careful to recognize that many transmen do not support his work and that he does not speak for all—or even most—FTMs.<sup>23</sup>

Also, by claiming to be the first and only transgender man porn star, Buck Angel opens himself up to such expectations and criticisms. His status as the “first” also makes him more likely to be emulated, thus making him something of a role model for other transgender men who are in pornography or who want to pursue a career in the adult entertainment industry.

The function of these pornographic films in the dilemma of transgender visibility can also be positioned alongside Foucault's notions of visibility and power. In *Discipline and Punish*,

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22 Thompson, “Interview with Buck Angel: Transexual-Man,” 61.

23 Audacia Ray, “Up in Buck's Business: One Transsexual Man Takes the Porn Industry by Storm,” *Spread*, Summer 2006, 22.

during his discussion of the Panopticon, Foucault states that “[v]isibility is a trap.”<sup>24</sup> He claims that the major effect of the Panopticon and a society premised on panopticism is “to induce...a state of consciousness and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power.”<sup>25</sup> When engaging in such a highly visible form of expression as hard core pornography, anyone, including the transgender men here, must negotiate a number of issues. On the one hand, there is the issue of free expression and the expression of pleasure and sexuality. On the other hand, however, is the issue of what happens once one participates in such visibility. One potentiality is that they are opening themselves up to criticism from a variety of fronts, from those who are against all pornography, those who are transphobic, and transgender people who do not like the way that they perceive transgender people as being represented in the films, just to name a few constituencies. This includes criticism and the attempted undermining of the actors' gender identities from the general public. According to Jamison Green, the more out one is about their transgender status, the more their self-identified gender comes into question. Despite their complicated construction and performance of their own masculinities, the moment they reveal their bodies, the transgender men are known to everyone as being transgender. The men in the films deal with this circumstance in a variety of ways. Buck Angel, and Diesel to a lesser extent, directly addresses it, verbally affirming his identity as a man in very nearly all of his interviews, including the one in *Buck's Beaver*. Many of the other transgender men, however, do not address the issue at all, simply leaving or ignoring it. Their non-acknowledgment may be a strategy in itself, a politics of non-engagement or indifference, as practiced by Judith Halberstam in her indifference toward the masculinity of the male body in

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24 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random House, 1977), 200.

25 *Ibid.*, 201.

her examination of female masculinity, discussed earlier in chapter two.<sup>26</sup>

Another potentiality is that the films could act as containment for the sexuality of transgender men. This is not to say that the films could not also precipitate a proliferation of alternative sexualities among transgender men. By showing other transgender men that alternative sexualities exist for them, they might perhaps be more willing to experiment and explore. This does not, however, preclude a sort of containment of sexualities. By portraying alternative sexualities in this format, in a film that is (at most) two hours long, among a select few transgender men, those sexualities could become contained by the films themselves. The viewer is able to digest their dose of transgender sexuality in a specifically delineated format and in a specific time frame. Transgender sexuality then need not occur anywhere else. In a sense, it potentially precludes transgender sexuality from the rest of the world by setting out such strict parameters. The containment also works in that hard core pornography itself, as a genre, still follows certain conventions, no matter how avant-garde. One example of such conventions is the money shot, as outlined by Linda Williams. Though the transgender men do not have a money shot in the traditional sense of ejaculation from a flesh penis, the surprise and shock employed by Buck Angel and Diesel could be seen as a form of the money shot.<sup>27</sup> The money shot is the climax of the scene; it is what the audience is supposedly waiting for the whole time. The surprise used by Buck and Diesel is similarly a sort of climax. The audience comes to these films waiting to see transgender men and their bodies and the element of surprise provides the viewer with what they want all in an instant, much like the traditional money shot. This is but one example of the conventions of hard core pornography by which the films are contained and constrained.

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<sup>26</sup> Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Thank you to Gayle Rubin for her help with this insight.

The ways in which Foucault's notion of confession and knowledge production and Green's concept of the dilemma of transgender visibility help in situating the element of surprise in the films are varied and complex. One cannot measure it all in terms of good or bad; the complications are both freeing and constraining. It is more fruitful instead to examine the complications in all of their contradictions than to attempt to say that transgender pornography is wholly positive or negative for anyone.

## **What Do We Make of It?: the Flexible Limits of Porn**

Throughout this project, I have brought together a wide range of theories and concepts to examine and explore the genre of hard core pornography featuring transgender men. I have looked at a variety of aspects of the films, including, but not limited to, gender performance, portrayal of alternative sexualities, what kind of masculinities the men in the films are constructing and acting out, the element of surprise, confession and knowledge production, and the dilemma of transgender visibility. I have used sources ranging from highly theoretical texts to pornographic films to magazine interviews to websites to sex guides to personal email communication. I believe that the heterogeneity of sources has been a strength to this project. By choosing sources from different and diverse locations, I have been able to bolster my claims with more than simply academic theory. In some cases, I have even been able to use the words of the actors or filmmakers themselves, which is helpful in that one does not have to guess at their meaning as they state it clearly.

As stated in the introduction, I would have liked nothing better than to include more recent films in my analyses. I have been unable to accomplish this, however, due to a variety of constraints. This is one of the difficulties of working with media made by people who are still alive and in the business: namely, that they keep making more. It would be impossible to stay on top of every film and every trend in the genre. Its relative newness means that it is changing rapidly all of the time. Due to the fact that there are still relatively so few films, each one adds something critical to the conversation. Leaving any of them out of the analysis weakens it and makes it incomplete. I am not worried about this, however, as it would be impossible to have a “complete” analysis. With the ever changing and malleable nature of information and media, including pornography, one can never obtain a complete or even clear image of what is

happening. I feel that this, however, is the beauty of working with this type of text. There is always something new unfolding, something to be discovered.

All too often in scholarship on pornography, one encounters a moralistic tone. Many people either have found pornography inherently oppressive, especially toward women, and therefore oppose it, people such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon.<sup>1</sup> I do not position my project in a moralistic sense. I am instead on the side of those people who see pornography as being far more complicated and nuanced, such as Linda Williams and Gayle Rubin.<sup>2</sup> I am not concerned with labeling hard core pornography featuring transgender men as either “good” or “bad.” That would show far more about my own personal moral inclinations than about anything that is happening in the pornography itself. Pornography starring transgender men is neither wholly positive nor wholly negative; it is far more complicated than that. By not condemning these films and by taking a more complex approach to them, I believe that I have done a better job of examining what the films are actually doing, as opposed to what I want them to be doing in the service of dogmatic moral beliefs.

In the end, what are we to make of all this? How should we interpret the existence and meaning of pornography starring transgender men? Of course, I have no hard and fast answers, as it is difficult to say anything certain about such a malleable medium as pornography. Is it significant that transgender men have chosen to produce and perform in hard core pornography? My answer would be yes. First of all, this is the first time that transgender men have ever been in hard core pornography. I think that this speaks to the expandable nature of pornography. Though it may take time, many, many years, in fact, hard core pornography, as a medium of expression, seems to be able to accommodate wide range of people, bodies, and sex acts. When

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1 For more on this position, please refer to Dworkin's *Pornography* and MacKinnon's *Only Words*.

2 For more on this position, please refer to Rubin's “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality” and Williams' *Hard Core*.



people, such as transgender men, begin to make their own pornography, this becomes more and more true. It is especially apparent at this point in history, when new forms of technology make the production and distribution of pornography cheaper and cheaper; one no longer has to obtain large amounts of money to produce a film. Anyone with a camera and a computer can upload hard core pornography to the Internet via such avenue as the websites “YouPorn” and “XTube.” On these sites, anyone can upload pictures or clips of themselves and/or others having sex. There have even been transgender men who have taken advantage of this, posting clips of themselves masturbating or having sex with other people. The advent of pornography featuring transgender men speaks to this flexible nature of hard core pornography.

The films examined here also push at the boundaries of what is the norm in pornography. Their bodies and genders provide something different that porn has not seen before. Also, the variety of their sexual encounters and activities is also different, as the norm in porn is to be either gay or straight and to not stray too much into regions labeled as “fetishes.” One of the dangers here, however, is the ease with which something new and different can be quickly fetishized in pornography. It seems as if you cannot help but to be fetishized if you are anything different from the norm. This compartmentalization could defuse liberating potential by turning the fact of transgender men in porn into an objectified freak-show. Nevertheless, the films do offer a vision of the potentiality of transgender sexualities, showing that they are many and various and that one need not fit a particular mold.

I hope that, during this project, I have raised more questions than I have provided answers. I believe that analysis should be used to help readers to form their own questions, rather than forcing a particular viewpoint upon them. I hope that my project has further complicated the fields in between which it travels, such as transgender studies and pornography

studies. In my mind, complication is often better than clarification in that it provides more opportunities for mistakes and discovery. One is more likely to find something new and important in complication than in clarification. I hope that the questions and issues raised here serve as a starting point for others in their analyses and contributions. Only by asking and creating more questions can we hope to sharpen our analyses, no matter the field. By pushing analysis into previously untouched areas, such as pornography featuring transgender men, one opens intellectual discourses to new options and expands the range of knowledge for all.

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