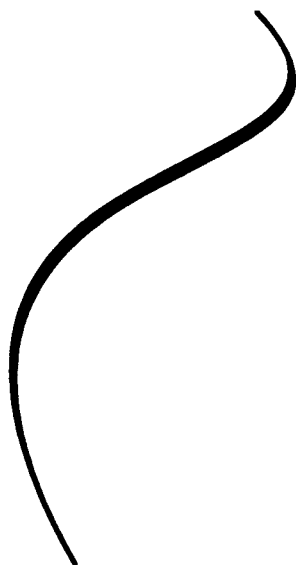


Masculinity and female bodies

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ABSTRACT. The visibility of feminine-to-masculine (FTM) transgenderism increased considerably in the 1990s. The late modern/postmodern concept of the body as malleable in service of (gendered) identity presentation facilitated this upsurge in two ways: first, transgenderism became intelligible in society through this discourse. Second, representations of masculinity became increasingly corporeal, performative, and thereby more adoptable for a female-bodied person. In addition, certain developments in the politics and circumstances of the transgender organizations, previously dominated by MTF transgenderists, now advanced the activity and participation of FTMs in particular. The rise of female masculinity underlines the general change of masculinity towards more emphasized corporeality.

Different approaches of social constructionism have changed the sociological perspectives of gender and sexuality during the last decades of the 20th century. Two trends culminated in the 1990s. First, there emerged a genre of scholarship, inspired by the work of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, particularly queer theory, which explored new aspects and dimensions of the socially constructed, performative character of gender and sexuality. This influential research sought to deconstruct discourses that naturalize the Western dichotomous gender order. Towards the end of the decade, however, a more thorough understanding of the physicality of the body within a social constructionist framework than Butler's (1993) concept of materialization was called for (Williams and Bendelow 1998). Second, the gendered dimension of men was "discovered": a variety of approaches – men's studies, critical studies of men, sociology of masculinities and a profeminist perspective on men and masculinities – emerged to address the issue more extensively than gender studies had done before (see e.g. Hearn 1998; Hearn and Lattu 2002; Whitehead 2002). The bulk of studies on men increased significantly and there was even a profeminist social science journal, *Men and Masculinities*, dedicated to the theme.

The two theoretical currents mentioned above had their equivalents also outside the world of scholarship since the gender construction scene of the 1990s was characterized by two rather



different trends. First, the quest to explore and challenge the limits of gender duality took place also in individual lives and in transgender organizations. The gender-blending trend and transgendered individuals were prominently featured in the mass media and popular culture (Denny 1996; Stryker 1998, 146). New and more radical politics were developed within transgender organizations renouncing unconditional adjustment in the normative gender categories of man or woman as the principle for integration in society (Bolin 1994; Califia 1997). This radicalization allowed for the development of new identities that departed from the medical constructions of transsexual and transvestite, which previously had formed the basis of the self-understandings of transgenderists (Wickman 2001, 13–21). People would define themselves as gender-benders, gender-blenders, bigenders or simply describe their identity more loosely using the umbrella concept of transgender (e.g. Feinberg 1996, x). Secondly, an increasing sexualization and commodification of the male body as an aesthetic object could be noticed in mass media (Bordo 2000). Both of these trends had roots deeper in the 20th century but seemed to reach unprecedented proportions in the 1990s.

The concrete crossing point of these two central trends of the 1990s gender (de)construction scenes would be FTM (female-to-male or feminine-to-masculine) transgenderism.¹ Given the centrality of the transgression of gender duality and the transformations of the embodiment of masculinity, it is hardly surprising that different kinds of corporeal expression of masculinity by genetically female persons have become increasingly visible in both academic and popular gender debates as well as in the practices of transgender subcultures. Previously, the transgender organizations as well as the public image of transgenderism had been dominated by diverse forms of MTF (male-to-female or masculine-to-feminine) transgenderism.

In this article, FTM transgenderism is discussed as the nexus of masculinity and transgenderism. Therefore, the circumstances of

the upsurge and new visibility of FTM transgenderism are examined in two spheres: the transgender communities and cultural representations of masculinity. The article addresses the following questions: Why did the rise of FTM transgenderism take place later than MTF transgenderism? Why did this upsurge start in the 1990s? How does it connect to the new, more aestheticized embodiment of performed masculinity?

In the first section below, the signs of increased FTM activity are explored. While the availability of numerical data on the occurrence of the practice of female masculinity is obviously limited, it is apparent that this activity has intensified and gained a higher profile during the 1990s, which creates new opportunities and inspiration for involvement. The second section deals with the changing circumstances of transgender communities in the 1990s and how they particularly furthered FTM activity. The third section reviews the changing representations of the male body, and their significance for female masculinity. The fourth and concluding section of the article discusses the late-modern and postmodern concept of a reflexive body as the backdrop of female masculinity. While the direct connection between the upsurge of female masculinity and the eroticized images of the male body is ambiguous, the notion of malleable bodies can be seen as a common frame of reference to both transgenderism (in general, not just FTM) and recent changes in masculinity representations. This discussion is informed by the literature written by FTM writers, material from the Internet pages of FTM organizations, and interviews with nine FTM transsexual persons (two from Finland, the UK and the US, respectively and three from Australia).²

The increasing visibility and activism of FTM transgenderists

One of the peculiarities of the history of the

medical treatments of transsexuality since the 1960s is the uneven ratio of MTF and FTM transsexual persons who approach medical units that provide sex-reassignment treatments (e.g. Cohen-Kettenis and Wålinder 1987, 177, Brown 1990, 57). Traditionally, in Western societies, a much larger number of male-to-female transsexuals have been seen by the medical professionals than female-to-males, the reported ratios being up to 8:1 (Cohen-Kettenis and Gooren 1999; Michel et al. 2001, 367–368).³ However, some studies suggest that a leveling-out of this imbalance seems to have taken place (Burnard and Ross 1986, 52; Garrels et al. 2000). The increase in the number of FTM transsexuals who seek sex reassignment seems somewhat puzzling. Neither the original imbalance nor the more recent increase in the number of FTM patients has been exhaustively explained in the literature. However, this trend in transsexuality is consistent with the rise of other forms of FTM transgender activity discussed below.

While relevant longitudinal numerical data of people involved in private practices of female masculinity outside the context of gender clinics are obviously unavailable, the intensification of FTM activity in the 1990s was apparent. It seems to have been both qualitative, in the sense that the visible varieties of FTM transgenderism became increasingly diverse, and quantitative, in that the occurrence of public expression of masculinity through genetically female bodies appears to have increased. This rise of the expression of female masculinity both increased the cultural significance of the phenomenon and provided new inspiration and opportunities for people who felt inclined to be involved. The higher profile of FTM activity was manifest in several contexts.

First, female-to-male transsexual people became increasingly active in the transsexual movement. A number of transgender organizations have had some high profile FTM activists. For example, trans-men such as Jamison Green, in the US, and Stephen Whittle, in the UK, were in the latter half of the 1990s among the most prominent faces of the

international transgender movement. The Finnish organization for transsexuals, *Trasek*, founded in 1984, appointed its first FTM chairperson in 1998. Furthermore, the 1990s saw the expansion of specialized FTM organizations complementing the general transgender organizations, which tended to be dominated by MTF trans-persons. They started from local support groups and developed into wider organizations. The San Francisco-based *FTM International*, founded in 1991, is the longest-running educational organization serving FTM transgendered people and transsexual men (FTM International 2002). Subsequently, a number of organizations have been founded, such as the *FTM Network in Britain* (FTM Network 2002). One of the newcomers is *FTM Australia*, founded in 2001 (F.T.M. Australia 2002).

These organizations provide information about FTM transgenderism, and about the female-to-male sex-reassignment process for their membership, scholars and journalists alike by maintaining web sites, producing printed publications and newsletters, and by organizing educational activities and events. The Internet resources linked from the web site of one organization to another are quite extensive by now. Peer support is organized through electronic discussion fora, counselling and social events.

Secondly, drag kings appeared on the subcultural entertainment scene. Drag-king shows and contests began to emerge in the larger cities of the US in the early years of the 1990s but they multiplied and started to gain greater media exposure in the latter half of the decade (Halberstam 1998a, 231–266; Maltz 1998). This development has significantly expanded the mode of expressing female masculinity from the traditional categories of lesbian butch and female-to-male transsexuality. Male impersonation on stage has a long tradition throughout the 20th century and beyond (Senelick 1993, 90–94; Drorbaugh 1993). However, the new acts have also introduced the theatrical and carnivalized elements of the drag show to the traditional stage performances of

female masculinity (Halberstam 1998a, 231–266; Maltz 1998). Still, the drag king as a concept and the drag king performance as a form of expression could also play a part in identity construction (Halberstam 1998a, 242–248; Murray 2001).

An Internet search on drag kings today yields hundreds of web sites. Drag king shows and contests are by now arranged throughout the Western world, in some venues on a regular weekly or monthly basis. Australian east coast cities seem to have become new centres of drag-king culture. The phenomenon has evidently reached the Nordic countries (Gentele 2002). The drag-king workshop, *King for a day*, of New York-based performance artist Diane Torr has toured the region (Mäklin 2001). Judging by the appearance of the previous year's winner at the Mr Drag-King Contest 2001 in Helsinki, it seems that the contest has become established as an annual event.

Thirdly, in the 1990s, there was also increased attention to feminine-to-masculine transgenderism in the mass media. In the feature articles on transsexuality and transgenderism in the popular magazines where one previously invariably would have seen a MTF person as the lead character, FTM transgenderists were now featured almost as often (e.g. Yoffe 1994; Thernstrom 1998; Mäklin 2001; Weigl 2002). Informative television and film documentaries on FTM transsexuals and on drag kings appeared in growing numbers towards the end of the 1990s. As an example of one of the first and most significant of such documentaries one could mention *You Don't Know Dick: Courageous Hearts of Transsexual Men*, directed by Candace Schermerhorn and Bestor Cram, from 1996.

Among the more notable of the film documentaries was *The Brandon Teena Story* (by Susan Muska and Gréta Ólafsdóttir, in 1998) documenting the much publicized murder case of a genetically female person whose gender presentation consistently convinced others that they were dealing with a young man. The murder of Brandon Teena was the most famous of several cases of lethal violence against

gender-ambiguous individuals that agitated a public reaction among transgenderists, a reaction that resulted in increasing activism (Califia 1997, 230–240; Hale 1998). The demonstrations outside the courtroom in Falls City, Nebraska, during the trial of Brandon's murderers have been considered the starting-point of a new type of more radical transgender activism (e.g. Hale 1998; Sloop 2000, 185). This activism strengthened the position of FTM transgenderists within the general transgender movement and made them more central to the symbolic imagery within the movement as well as in public discourse.

The story of Brandon Teena was later featured in the 1999 Hollywood film *Boys Don't Cry* (directed by Kimberley Peirce). This film brought FTM transgenderism to the consciousness of the wider audiences of fictive cinema. In alignment with the general tendency of media coverage of transgenderism, MTF transgenderism had previously dominated the public image of transgenderism also in cinema and in TV soaps (e.g. *Ally McBeal*), MTF characters having been sympathetically and seriously depicted years before in well-known films such as *The Crying Game* (1992), *Farewell My Concubine* (1993), *Ed Wood* (1994) and *The Adventures of Priscilla – Queen of the Desert* (1994).

Fourthly, in the academic field, there has emerged a rapidly growing literature on FTM transgenderism (e.g. Devor 1997a). Since the late 1990s, this scholarship has increasingly been written by academics who situate themselves in an insider perspective with various kinds of FTM transgender experiences of their own (Halberstam 1998a; Prosser 1998; Rubin 1998; Cromwell 1999). FTM academics such as Stephen Whittle and Jason Cromwell have given trans-men their own voice in the prestigious academic discourses.

In conclusion, the intensification and higher profile of FTM activity has resulted in a shift from MTF dominance towards a more even MTF-FTM balance throughout the world of transgenderism – from the demographics of gender-clinic patients, advocacy in transgender

organizations and analysis of transgenderism in academia to drag show entertainment and media coverage. Signs of this trend can be seen in many Western societies. (A cross-cultural comparison of societies with different gender systems requires a separate discussion. Therefore, the focus of this article is limited to Europe, Australia and North America.)

This change in the gender balance draws attention to the gendered character of transgenderism and has important implications for the interpretation of the phenomenon in feminist and queer gender theory. The traditional feminist interpretation of the imbalance between the observed occurrence of MTF and FTM transgender expression offers the lower status of the feminine gender in patriarchy as the explanation (e.g. Woodhouse 1989, 137–143). According to this view, a patriarchal culture regards transgressing the gender boundary from masculine to feminine, towards the bottom of the hierarchy, as humiliating for men, and therefore irrational if done voluntarily (Burnard and Ross 1986, 53).⁴ Thus, male-bodied individuals with impulses to do femininity have been more pressed either to resort to medical and psychiatric categories to explain their behaviour or to position themselves in the subcultures, by adopting an identity as, for example, a drag queen (when not completely concealing their inclinations). Following this logic, female masculinity would be somewhat less provocative, and require less explanation when incorporated in a woman's role, that is, as long as the boundary between gender categories is not violated (Cromwell 1999, 91).⁵

While this reasoning seems plausible to an extent, the recent equalization of the FTM-MTF ratio would indicate that it could not be the sole explanation. The current FTM-MTF ratio can hardly be an indicator of an eradication of the status difference between men and women. One of the FTM transsexual interviewees suggested that the MTF transsexuals, being under greater pressure, had fought for the opportunity for sex-reassignment treatments, and that FTMs were now merely taking the chance that had emerged

through the work of the MTFs. However, this account does not explain the rise of other forms of FTM transgenderism than transsexuality. There are other factors involved. These will be explored below.

Changes in the transgender communities and their opportunities

In the mid-1990s, a new, increasingly bold and radical approach in transgender activism started to emerge in the US (Denny 1996, 4; Califia 1997, 228–233). It spread rapidly to other countries, for example, the UK (Munro 2000), Finland (Wickman 2001) and Australia (Brown 1998). The new transgender politics challenged the binaries of man/woman and transsexual/cross-dresser (Bolin 1994; Boswell 1997). It departed from the rigid idea of a category of “true transsexuality” according to the medical model. In addition to passing (i.e. being taken socially as members of their preferred gender) and blending into their new gender, transsexuals could now adopt an identity as openly transgendered. Bolin (1994; 1996) traces the roots of this development to a shift in the power balance between medical professionals involved in sex reassignment, and their clients, in the 1980s. During the Reagan administration, a large number of university-affiliated gender clinics were closed down. These clinics had enforced the segregation of transvestites and transsexuals, and the latter group's conformity to conventional sex/gender dichotomies. The surviving smaller number of private, client-centred and service-oriented clinics contributed to a “greater flexibility in the expression of gender identities” (Bolin 1994, 463). Califia (1997, 223–226), however, attributes the development of the new identity category of transgender to changing social attitudes towards body modification and to synergetic demands by other groups, e.g. pro-sex feminists and sado-masochists, for the individual's right to control one's own body. New conceptual frameworks

provided by feminist and queer scholarship, which emphasized fluid and polymorphous identities, also opened new lines of thought, spaces of identity outside the traditional gender dichotomy (Brown 1998; Hale 1998). All this allowed more space in the identity construction of people who earlier might have been, to a greater extent, pressed to conform to the traditional image of the transsexual who aims at invisibility in the new gender status after completed sex reassignment.

In the new approach to transgenderism, less emphasis than before was laid on the desire to alter the genitals into the best possible imitation of the genitals of the “opposite sex” as constitutive of transsexual identity. This flexibility has made the position of FTM transsexuals easier, since the quality of phalloplasty techniques is considerably inferior to that of MTF genital surgery. Some FTM transsexuals have not considered genital surgery a viable option because of the poor results of the available surgical techniques. The more fluid definition of transsexual identity has come to seem more feasible to them. Some of them prefer to call themselves, for example, “transmen” rather than “female-to-male transsexuals” (Cromwell 1999).

It has been stated that this new flexibility in the transgender communities has made some people take the step from the identity category of butch lesbian (a traditional masculine identity in many lesbian communities) into the realm of transgender, from a masculine woman to third or other gender or to FTM transsexuality (Devor 1997b; Halberstam 1998a, 120–173; 1998b; Hale 1998). This development was allegedly spurred by hostility against female masculinity in some lesbian communities (especially since the 1970s) owing to both separatist feminist purism and assimilationist identity politics, which was characterized by a need to be absolved from the stigma of unclear gender identities and to gain respectability. Earlier, those lesbian communities, which accepted butches, had been a social and political home for a number of masculine females (whether they ultimately identified as

women or not). Since the advent of FTM sex reassignment, the possibility of different trajectories of female masculinity, some leading to identification as an FTM transsexual man and others retaining the individual in the category of lesbian woman, has created serious tensions at the “Butch-FTM border” (Halberstam 1998b). This separatism contributed to the creation of clearer contours to the independent activism of FTM transgenderists.

If the queer politics of transgender organizations and, at times, problematic relations with lesbian communities contributed to the upsurge of FTM transgenderisms in the beginning of the 1990s, then the effects of the simultaneous expansion of Internet communication on transgender activism (Gilbert 1997, 65–66) could account for the dramatic extent of the upsurge later during the decade. The access to and use of the Internet facilitated transgender activity and community building in two major ways (Whittle 1998). First, the sheer expansion of communication opportunities on the world-wide web was crucial in connecting trans-regionally individuals who belong to a small minority. In their local community, transgenderists were often completely deprived of contact with other trans-people. The increasing communication opportunities benefited FTM transgenderists in particular since they had been a minority even within the MTF-dominated transgender communities. Second, the disembodied character of cyberspace facilitated a virtual participation. It gave a voice and a higher profile to individuals who in physical reality would have been disadvantaged by their physical habitus. The transgender community had previously often been characterized by a hierarchy that valorizes postoperative status among transsexuals and passing in the gender of choice/presentation among most transgenderists (Whittle 1998). Thus, cyberspace increased the input of non-passing transgenderists. The participation of non-passing transgenderists, in turn, furthered the politics of fluid gender categories. As has already been suggested, this

shift away from the focus on complete sex reassignment including genital surgery paved the way for the increase in FTM activity.

Changing cultural representations of masculinity and male bodies

In analysing the expression and construction of masculinity through the body, several scholars have contrasted the aesthetic (form, visual characteristics) and the functional (strength, endurance, capability) aspects of the muscular male body when discussing its symbolic meanings as a signifier of masculinity (Dutton 1995; Jefferson 1998; Petersen 1998, 48–51). During the 20th century the aesthetic qualities gradually gained prominence while technological developments reduced the functional significance of muscle power in industrial production and warfare (Brod 1995; Bordo 2000). Finally, the sexualized public display of the white male body in mainstream media reached unprecedented proportions in the 1980s and, especially, the 1990s. (Earlier, primarily non-European, “exotic” male bodies had been exposed to erotic objectification [Carby 1998, 45–83]). First, the image of the representation of the clad male figure in fashion photography became more sensual (Nixon 1997). Then, male bodies in various stages of undress started to appear in advertisements, films, music videos, even erotic stage shows aimed at women (MacKinnon 1997; Williams and Bendelow 1998, 198–201; Bordo 2000; Kinnunen 2001, 214–217; Smith 2002).

At the same time, the cultural ideal conveyed by media images became significantly more muscular (while any traces of fat were eliminated) (Pope et al. 2000). The change in cultural imagery has had consequences for the relation of “ordinary” men and boys to their bodies (Peixoto Labre 2002). Male fashion and the industries of various body-improving and

appearance-enhancing products and services for men have exploded, from gyms, cosmetics and nutrition products to cosmetic surgery (Brod 1995, 8; Bordo 2000, 219–220). Excesses have also been observed. The medical field reports that men’s body dysmorphia, or the “Adonis complex”, that is, pathological dissatisfaction with one’s body and appearance, has increased significantly (Pope et al. 2000, 84–101; Castle 2001).⁶

Cultural products such as the photographic self-portraits by Loren Cameron (e.g. Cameron 1996) illustrate the crossing point of the reappearance of the appreciation of the aesthetic values of the muscular male body and FTM transsexuality. Cameron’s poses accentuate the male-looking sculpted muscularity of the body, but do not hide his transgender status. The mastectomy scars are occasionally visible, and, to a mainstream viewer, the lack of a penis in the nude picture seems at first sight a stark contrast to the look of a classical sinewy Adonis torso.

The simultaneous occurrence of the increased sexualization of the male body in cultural products and the upsurge of female-bodied masculinity raises a number of questions. These questions relate to two subject matters. The first set of questions relates to personal motivations of FTM trans-persons: Has the new physical image of masculinity made it more desirable as an identity or have differently gendered biological females merely become freer to express masculinity in more transgressive ways? The second set of questions addresses the cultural parameters of performing female masculinity: Has the new appearance-centred corporeality of white heterosexual masculinity had consequences for how women and other person’s of female genetic phenotype choose to do masculinity? The recent cultural visibility of aestheticized masculine physicality might be regarded as providing female-bodied persons necessary performative means to express masculinity in ways that actually become visible and more immediately recognizable in mainstream Western culture that links gender to body and biology. Has the new, more dramatically performative character of

masculinity posed new requirements on doing masculinity and/or added to the repertoire of means of doing masculinity?

A psychologizing focus on the motivations of individuals entails several problems. First, the coincidence of the two masculinity trends is so striking that it would be tempting to search for a direct connection through which the new styles of representation of male embodiment would produce an increased interest in female masculinity. However, on the strictly individual level, the idea of an immediate connection would direct attention towards ideas of a narcissistic craving for the attention that a physically attractive object of the gaze receives or a fetishist desire to own a male body. This would be the reverse version of “autogynephilia”, a theory of the dynamics of male-to-female transsexuality, which links the desire to have one’s male body transformed into a female one, in the first place, with sexual urges, instead of gender-identity issues (Blanchard 1989). *Autogynephilia* is a hypothesis that has roused heated debate and bitter resistance in MTF transgender communities because it has been seen to reduce the gender identity troubles of transsexuals to sexual quirks (Ekins and King 2001). Its influence on medical and psychiatric literature on transgenderism has remained limited.

Second, the focus on the individual level poses a methodological problem. The scarcity of material on individual FTM transgender experience from the period before the early 1990s makes it difficult empirically to establish the influence of the changing cultural representations of masculinity on the increase in expressions of female masculinity, at the level of personal motivations. However, a cultural analysis of the conditions of FTM transgenderists’ masculinity representation is more feasible.

In the dominant gender construction of the 20th century, masculine men are seen as active, performing numerous tasks. They “just are” masculine in the process of their activity, while women have to do a great deal of (painful) work “just to be” feminine (Wolf 1990). According to

Halberstam (1998a, 234–235) this construction renders hegemonic masculinity “non-performative” in the sense that white heterosexual masculinity to a lesser extent than femininity would be staged, i.e. produced through activity that is explicitly focused on deliberate impression control. This inexpressiveness of hegemonic masculinity is particularly emphasized by the fact that expressive performativity has been more associated with ethnically or sexually “other” masculinities (black, Latino or gay macho styles) (Halberstam 1998a, 235, Lahti 1998, Pope et al. 2000, 205–207).

The traditional non-performativity of hegemonic masculinity is highlighted by the limitations of the means available for successful projection of instantly recognizable white heterosexual masculinity in the context of male impersonation on stage. The excerpt of a positive review (below) of a theatrical performance, which involves impersonation of middle-/upper-class white males, suggests that masculinity is best projected by avoiding expressiveness.

There is no swaggering or flexing, no belching or bellowing. If in part that is because of the characters’ class status, it is also another indication that masculinity need not be – often must not be – exaggerated in order to be performed. While the actors worked on sitting with their knees apart and broadening their gestures, in emotional terms, performing maleness means reducing facial expressiveness, reining in exuberance, holding back – the antithesis of what drag queens do (Solomon 1993, 148).

This kind of male impersonation relies instead on the notion of the masculine gender as the “default expectation” in Western societies (Kessler and McKenna 1978, 142–164; Devor 1989, 47–49). A person whose gender is not unequivocally presented is, in the first place, assumed to be a man. However, the appearance of drag king performance on subcultural entertainment scenes in the 1990s introduced more emphasized theatricality and irony to the stage tradition of male impersonation. According to Halberstam (1998a, 231–266), this

feature was more prominent in the drag-king shows than in drag-king contests.

In the contests, we notice a lack of performativity within drag-king presentations that can be attributed to the fact that dominant male masculinities tend to present themselves in the register of the real, eschewing the performative and the artificial. For this reason, the challenge of the drag-king performance is to bring to light the artifice of dominant masculinity; this is often accomplished by highlighting the tricks and gadgets of the sexism on which male masculinity depends (Halberstam 1998a, 266).

The flourishing of drag-king performances since the late 1990s implies that drag kings have tackled the challenge posed by the traditionally non-performative character of hegemonic masculinity. This task has arguably become somewhat easier when cracks have emerged in the masque of inexpressiveness that used to constitute the only legitimate performance of hegemonic masculinity. The corporeal performativity earlier associated with black and gay masculinities has filtered through to the white middle-class mainstream in terms of more decorative fashions and the eroticized spectacle of the body (Nixon 1997; Bordo 2000). In conjunction with the fetishising of the male body in the mass media (referred to earlier), there has also been an upsurge of stage events focused on the male body and corporeal expression of masculinity, ranging from male fashion shows to Chippendales' strip shows (Smith 2002). These performances produce blue prints for how corporeal masculinity can be expressed on stage, readily applicable for drag-king performers. On the other hand, Halberstam (1998a, 232–266) claims that female masculinity is not merely mimicry of male masculinity but that the influences go both ways. Effects used in drag-king art have been (often unknowingly) appropriated for presentation of male masculinity (Halberstam 2001). This mutual exchange strengthens the burgeoning performativity of masculinity.

Summary and discussion

Transgenderism, masculinity and the reflexive body

The visibility of feminine-to-masculine transgenderism increased considerably in the 1990s. Previously, masculine-to-feminine transgenderism had been more prominently represented both in the activities of transgendered people and in the media coverage of them. The intensification of FTM transgender activity and visibility could now be observed in several contexts. For example, the gender balance of the previously male-to-female-dominated transsexual movement became more even when the activity of female-to-male transsexuals increased. Similarly, the number of female-to-male transsexuals who approached medical units seeking sex-reassignment treatments is reported to have grown. The appearance of drag kings in subcultural entertainment and identity construction scenes represented a qualitative widening of FTM transgender expression. This intensified activity also contributed to greater and broader mass media visibility. In the academic field, the emergence of a rapidly growing literature on female masculinity (e.g. Devor 1989; 1997; Halberstam 1998; Cromwell 1999) has consolidated the change of the gender balance in the world of transgenderism.

In this paper, feminine-to-masculine transgenderism has been analysed as the nexus of two phenomena: transgenderism and cultural representation of masculinity. This conceptualization highlights two frames of reference for the rise of female masculinity. First, several developments in the transgender communities improved the conditions of feminine-to-masculine trans-people's participation and activity in transgender organizations in the 1990s. For example, the increased use of the Internet and decreased dependence on the medical establishment advanced more radical politics in the transgender organizations. The new politics benefited FTM participation by allowing for

fluid identity options that were not bound up with commitment to complete sex reassignment, including genital surgery. The unsatisfactory quality of sex-reassignment surgery techniques for FTMs made this shift particularly welcome to FTM transsexuals. Furthermore, a combination of radical feminist purism and pressures to conform to traditional gender norms in some lesbian communities contributed to a hostility that pushed some masculine female-bodied individuals from a butch lesbian position into the realm of transgender.

Second, the upsurge of female-bodied masculinities and FTM transgenderisms coincided with a proliferation of eroticized images of male bodies in the mainstream mass media over the 1990s. The media images had an effect on how men perceived their bodies and how they “did masculinity” (e.g. Bordo 2000; Pope et al. 2000). The presumption that the sexualized treatment of the male body in cultural imagery would interrelate also with the way genetic females “do masculinity” is not far-fetched.

The commodification of the male body entailed increasingly embodied visual representations of masculinity. The new, more dramatically performative character of masculinity has both posed new requirements on feminine-to-masculine transgenderists when they do masculinity and added to the repertoire of corporeal means of representation of masculinity. Since gender in mainstream culture is associated with the body and biology, female masculinity has become more visible and instantly recognizable when masculinity can be signified in performative ways that are more appearance-related. On the other hand, the increased physicality of masculinity creates a double burden for those female-to-male transsexuals who are oriented towards complete body reversal. There is now a certain pressure to add all the hard work that men nowadays do to reach the ideals of the male body on top of the inevitable struggle of the sex-reassignment process with surgery and hormone therapies. Judging by the rise of FTM transgenderism, the inspiring opportunities and impulses seem to

have outweighed the restrictive normativity of the new body ideals.

Both transgenderism and the increasing corporeality of masculinity representation can be seen as reflections of the late-modern (Giddens 1991; Williams and Bendelow 1998) or postmodern (Butler 1993) individual’s relation to the body. This relation is characterized by notions of a malleable and reflexive body.⁷ During the past few decades, the practices of body adornment and “improvement” have penetrated ever deeper into the flesh (Wolf 1990; Wickman 1996). In Western urban environments, relatively permanent adornments such as tattoos and piercings, which involve intrusion through the surface of the body, as well as reshaping of body parts by means of plastic surgery or gym exercise, have become more mundane than they were earlier in the 20th century. These more radical appearance-enhancing techniques have taken their place beside the previously common means of personality presentation on the body such as clothing, removable make-up and hair dye.⁸ As Faurschou (1988, quoted in Williams and Bendelow 1998, 73) concisely puts it: “[T]he balance within consumer culture has tilted from bodies producing commodities (i.e. ‘externalising objects of labour’), to commodities producing bodies (i.e. ‘internalising objects of consumption’).”

The upsurge of FTM transgenderism in the 1990s can be understood through the combined, contemporaneous effects of the late-modern or postmodern notions of the malleability and reflexivity of the body on both transgenderism and masculinity. First, transgender practices, which may involve reshaping the body’s gender signifiers by medical sex-reassignment technologies, are quite compatible with a discourse in which the body is increasingly seen as malleable in the service of (gendered) identity or personality presentation (Lundgren and Kroon 1996; Califia 1997, 224–225). Transgenderism becomes more readily intelligible (both to the general public and to medical professionals) in a discourse that

considers the body as an outer expression of an inner core or identity.

Second, it can also be argued that the malleabilization of the body has inflicted a greater change on the corporeal presentation of masculinity than on femininity. While it would hardly make sense to claim that the presentation of masculinity is more dependent on physical appearance than performance of femininity is, and men are hardly more pressured by gendered body ideals than women are, the change towards greater emphasis on body modification during the past few decades has been more dramatic regarding masculinity than regarding femininity since the starting-points were very different. Before the 1980s and 1990s, in mainstream Western culture, masculinity was considered as linked to aesthetic, corporeal presentation to a much lesser extent than femininity.

In conclusion, the cultural and technical malleabilization of the body socially facilitated FTM transgenderism in two ways. First, body modification and, by implication, transgender practices suited the new body discourses and thereby became somewhat more intelligible in society. Second, conscious work on the appearance became a more appropriate aspect of the expression of white heterosexual masculinity, which thereby became easier to adopt and/or parody in corporeal ways.

The gendered dimension of the reflexive and malleable body requires more analysis. Corporeal masculinity representation and the gender balance of transgenderism are currently cutting edge themes in this area of study. It can neither be naïvely assumed that changes in the gender (im)balance in transgenderism, or in the sexual objectification of male and female bodies, are self-evident signs of a new equality, nor can these changes be lightly dismissed by referring to the historical inequality of men and women. It is not enough to state that FTM transgenderisms cannot be considered the mirror image of MTF transgender expression because of the asymmetrical relation between masculinity and femininity in society. Neither should the study of the increasing public sexualization of male bodies be dismissed on the

grounds that it is not equal to the historical objectification of women (because it is not related to the general gender inequality in the same way).

This article has concluded that increased visibility of feminine-to-masculine transgenderism is linked to the increasingly corporeal forms of masculinity presentation through the common background of these two phenomena in the late- or postmodern malleabilization of the body. Thus, the rise of female masculinity underlines the general change in masculinity towards more emphasized corporeality. This is an example of the illuminating power of the study of transgenderism to highlight more general gender issues. However, using transgenderism like this, as an indicator for other gender issues, requires caution. The transgendered people themselves and their perspective should not be forgotten or ignored (see note 7).

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NOTES

1. *Transgenderism* has become the most widely used term in social science literature (Ekins and King 1999) to denote (a) acts of crossing over the gender line, often through clothing, body modification or stylization of mannerisms, and (b) behaviour and identities that transcend the idea of two genders. The occasional use of the plural, *transgenderisms*, in this article, emphasizes the diversity of different forms and modes of transgender expression. This wide definition of transgenderism includes but is not limited to surgically oriented transsexuality. The use of the words *transsexuality* or *transsexual(s)* signals a more narrow focus on medical

conceptualizations of transgenderism or on people who relate their identity to these conceptualizations and are oriented towards as complete physical sex reassignment as possible by hormonal and surgical means. The meaning of the abbreviation *FTM* depends on whether it is attached to the concept of transsexuality or transgenderism. In the context of transsexuality, *FTM* stands for *female-to-male* (e.g. Devor 1997). However, in a wider sense *FTM* includes *feminine-to-masculine* and *female-toward-male* transgenderisms, a variety of masculinity expressions by genetically female-bodied persons (e.g. Hale 1998). This definition comes close to Judith Halberstam's (1998a) concept of *female masculinity*.

2. The interviews (45–90 minutes long, conducted in 1998–2002) focused on the informants' experiences of and activism in transgender organizations.
3. The embeddedness of transsexuality in socio-cultural determinants is further highlighted by the differences between different countries in the prevalence of MTF and FTM transsexuality. Several studies found reversed sex ratios in eastern European countries during the cold war (Burnard and Ross 1986, 53; Godlewski 1988).
4. On the other hand, scholars such as Raymond (1980; 1996) and Daly (1984; 1990) have labelled MTF transsexuals as agents of patriarchy who infiltrate women's autonomous spaces, and FTM transsexuals as mere misled tokens that are used to obscure the patriarchal functions of transsexuality.
5. Even if the masculinity of females may be better tolerated than the femininity of males, especially in childhood (compare tomboys and sissy boys), there are limits. FTM transgenderists do experience harassment and violence. Confusion about a person's gender or a link to homophobia seems to increase the likelihood of violent reactions, such as in the case of Brandon Teena.
6. The literature about the "Adonis complex" is primarily American. However, the phenomenon is by no means restricted to the US (Pope et al. 2000, 138–145). The media images are obviously visible in many corners of the world. Still, their normative power does not seem to be quite as strong, for example, in Finland as in the US. For instance, the magazine *Men's Health* has been identified as an example of the channels through which the muscular photo model appearance is made normative for men (Peixoto Labre 2002). In the

US and the UK, this magazine has been very successful. In contrast, the Finnish language version was a commercial failure.

7. The development towards increasing malleability of the body can be described within the frameworks of both late modernism and postmodernism. In postmodern thinking, the body is seen as merely a means/vehicle for materialization of discourses/discursive ideas (Butler 1993). According to Giddens (1991) and Williams and Bendelow (1998, 67–68) the body is, in late modernity, seen as something that can be shaped in designs that reflect the individuals' personality. The present analysis does not require complete commitment to one or the other perspective. In both perspectives, the body is seen as malleable in the service of identity presentation. The conclusions of this paper can be regarded at two levels. Either the phenomena and the changes discussed in this paper can be seen as purely discursive, or they can be seen as changes of cultural opportunities that allow different kinds of expression of identities/selves that have a prediscursive base. However, the postmodernist perspective involves some problems regarding subjective integrity. These problems become accentuated when discussing a small minority such as transgenderists. The most radical postmodern forms of social constructionism involve a risk of reducing transgenderists to inhuman cultural signs comparable to any cultural product. This feature of some deconstructionist theorizing has been criticized by transgendered scholars (Rubin 1998; Hale 1997; Cromwell 1999; Namaste 2000). This concern becomes particularly topical in a cultural analysis like this one, far removed from an empirical study that lets transgenderists' own voices speak. This is why postmodern deconstructionism has been referred to cautiously in this article, although my conclusions certainly can be read within that framework.
8. Dieting, in various forms, is a more traditional mode of appearance control that aims at bodily changes beyond the skin. It has retained a constant significance in the Western post-war beauty industry.

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