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Jacqueline Hope Freedman
Scripps College

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Disidentified Masculinities

By
Jacqueline Hope Freedman

Submitted to Scripps College in Partial Fulfillment of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Media Studies

Professor Ming-Yuen S. Ma
Pitzer College

Professor Ken Gonzales-Day
Scripps College

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“What are the possibilities of politicizing disidentification, this experience of misrecognition, this uneasy sense of standing under a sign to which one does and does not belong?”

—Judith Butler, Bodies that Matter, 219

“When I was born, they looked at me and said: What a good boy, what a smart boy, what a strong boy! And when you were born they looked at you and said: What a good girl, what a smart girl, what a pretty girl!”

—The Barenaked Ladies, What a Good Boy

“Because identities are created dialogically, misrecognition can be internalized, resulting in a damaged sense of identity...misrecognitions...is the fundamental dilemma of the modern era.”

—Joel Olson on Charles Taylor, The Abolition of White Democracy, 107
Conceptual Basis

The media disseminates dominant ideologies to the public and in doing so has created a definition for masculinity. “Images from the media provide examples and models for men to follow” and personal and public notions of masculinity are idealized and exaggerated (Moss 21), and unhealthy societal pressures and depictions of masculinity in America encourage traditional—and expected—masculine traits and behaviors: such as muscular physique, white skin, strong bone structure, powerful, emotionless, etcetera. “It is a code of conduct that requires men to maintain masculine postures and attitudes...at all times and in all places. Masculinity includes the symbols, uniforms, chants, and plays that make this the boys’ team rather than the girls’ team. It is a fulltime job” (Trago 544). Amidst navigating personal identities, Millennials, the much desired demographic of marketers, are bombarded with advertisements, blockbuster films, and examples of masculinity, more than any other previous generation, that help construct a dominant ideology around masculinity: hegemonic masculinity. But what if hegemonic masculinity does not describe what one prescribes to as one’s own identity?

This grey area of masculine identity is the realm I plan to explore and discover the struggles of what it means to be masculine in today’s Gramscian understanding of masculine “common sense.” I have created a multimedia art installation including a select few of the affected Millennial Generation’s views of individual identity and masculinity with the hopes of deconstructing the socially constructed and exclusive notions of masculinity by defining a generation’s
“common sense.” My goal of this project is to validate the need to redefine hegemonic masculinity by way of Gramsci’s short mention of a common sense as “continually transforming;” thus, proving the fluidity and obsolete understanding of the most widespread conception of masculinity by uncovering the common sense of the Millennial Generation through Muñoz’s understanding of disidentification.

Why this project, why masculinity? What about femininity? I believe it is important, after three years of learning about the effects of the media and society on women, to explore the media’s influence on men and masculinity. Through my Media Studies classes and internships, I have deconstructed feminism, the media’s representations of femininity, and what it does—or does not mean—to be feminine, but never masculinity or what is means to be masculine. The hope of this project is to uncover the affects of the media on masculinity.

A primary influence for the inspiration of the photography portion of my project includes Chad States’ Masculinities photography project where he explores what is means today to be a man. In States’ own words, this “project was just a natural extension of a question that I have always asked myself; “Am I masculine?” I am a gay man and have always been aware of my difference and consequently became more aware of “masculine” mens’ way of behaving and how they differed or were similar to my own behavior. This awareness then led me to question what was truly masculine. I could never answer that question fully so I decided to ask it of others, which then became the project.” He did this project through a Craigslist listing with the body of the post saying, “I am doing a photography project on masculinity. If you identify as being masculine, please get back to me” (Bahadur).
He photographs his subjects in the poses and settings they find most masculine, making portraits of masculinity that broaden our ideas of what masculinity means, and this instigated my exploration into the realm of constructed masculinity by the media.

Furthermore, Loren Cameron’s portrait work also has guided my exploration in the realm of gender and masculinity. Cameron photographs lesbian and transsexual bodies in their native environments, as well as self-portraits during his physiological transition from female to male are documented in his work Body Alchemy: Transsexual Portraits (1996). The front cover displays a picture of Cameron, in a nude body building-like pose, injecting a syringe into his upper buttocks of testosterone. He explores the struggle and transition involved in becoming a gender within the social constructs of the meanings of gender and what is masculine.

The theoretical basis of my project includes two viewpoints of masculinity: the mainstream “common sense” hegemonic masculinity and the disidentified masculinity. The following sources give brief understandings of what “masculinity” is—or really is not. The first will be binary minded and typical of “manly-man” masculinity that is displayed by the mainstream media. But first, we must discuss Antonio Gramsci’s “common sense” concept. Gramsci understood common sense to be an instinctual, “uncritical and largely unconscious way of perceiving and understanding.” It “is a collective noun, like religion” yet it “is not something rigid and immobile, but is continually transforming itself, enriching itself with scientific ideas and with philosophical opinions which have entered ordinary life” (Hoare 625,
Correspondingly [Gramsci] uses the phrase “good sense’ to mean the practical, but not necessarily rational or scientific attitude,” and “every social stratum has its own ‘common sense’ and its own ‘good sense’ ” (Hoare 625, 630). Thus, I hope to prove the fluidity of common sense by recategorizing “the most widespread conception” of masculinity, which I believe to be good sense not common sense, due to its ease of binary and practicality, and uncovering the common sense of the Millennial Generation (Hoare 630).

One of the leading thinkers on theoretical masculinity and men studies, Raewyn Connell and her article Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept (2005), discusses the privilege of certain forms of masculinity—the culturally dominant type—usually referred to as hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is normative and is “the currently most honored way of being a man, it require[s] all other men to position themselves in relation to it” (Connell 832): an ideal, a definitive standard to masculinity. Nick Trujillo describes similar understandings of hegemonic masculinity in his article Hegemonic Masculinity on the Mound: Media Representations of Nolan Ryan and American Sports Culture (1991); however, more focused along the lines of sports and the representations of masculinity through newspaper coverage. Meanwhile, Robert Hanke's On Masculinity: Theorizing Masculinity With/In the Media (1998) describes hegemonic masculinity in a different way than Connell and Trujillo. Hanke’s definition refers to the “social ascendancy of a particular version or model of masculinity that, operating on the terrain of ‘common sense’ and conventional morality, defines ‘what it means to be a man.’ ” He too, uses Gramscian framework and understands
“common sense [as a] fragmentary, incoherent, ambiguous, [and] contradictory” (Hanke *Theorizing* 186), and unlike Connell and Trujillo, he recognizes that “hegemonic masculinity is won not only through coercion but through consent, even though there is never a complete consensus” (Hanke *Hegemonic* 243).

This incomplete consensus, I believe, is described by the queer theorist, José Esteban Muñoz and his book *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (2009) and his third mode of dealing with a dominant ideology. The first mode is one that many of us are familiar with: ‘identification.’ Identification is where a “‘Good Subject’ chooses the path of identification with discursive and ideological forms.” Similarly, the second mode, ‘counteridentification,’ is where “‘Bad Subjects’ resist and attempt to reject the images and identificatory sites offered by dominant ideology and proceed to rebel” (Muñoz 11). The third mode, which is my conceptual focus, is disidentification.

This aspect “neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology. Instead of buckling under the pressure of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism),” it ‘works on and against’ hegemony. It “is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance” (Muñoz 11-12). Disidentification works as the negotiating mechanism for common sense because it is against assimilation to mainstream masculinity as well as asks individuals to be their personal identity in
spite of what hegemonic masculinity dictates. However, the unfortunate
characteristic of disidentification is the ever-present power dynamic of hierarchies
of the pre-established hegemonic masculinity.
Methodology

The format of my project is twofold: photography and audio. The project consists of a photographic representation of 12 individuals, with two photos per person. This diverse group of individuals are between the ages of 18-25 from the United States and other countries, of different races and ethnicities as well as socioeconomic classes. I refused to limit my models to strictly the cisgender men and the biological sex XY chromosome and allow members of non-binary genders to participate if they are comfortable, and fortunately, I had the opportunity to work with one genderqueer individual as well as two masculine females. I believe by interviewing members across the gender spectrum my end result will be a much more realistic idea of what masculinity means today.

The portraits are the answers to two questions that help orient the individuals. In advanced of the photo shoot, my subjects knew the prompts in order for them to prepare their answers if necessary: specific clothing or location ideas for their portraits. The first portrait question, “what part of your body makes you feel most masculine?” helped guide my subject to pose in whatever way they see fit. The second photograph is also be a photographic answer to the question “what is a feminine quality about yourself?” I believe these questions forced each individual to reflect upon himself or herself and resulted in creative and thought provoking images that are the backbone to this project.
The audio portion of my project is be created by interviews I conducted with each subject of my photographs and I recorded their responses with an audio recorder. The eight questions (See Figure 2) asked are given to the individual prior to the interview, just as the photo prompts were, in order for them to contemplate their answers and so they have time to process any anecdotes or specific media examples they would like to include in their interviews. For the spring semester, I spliced and configured the responses to help create an atmospheric soundtrack that acts as “background noise” to surround the pictures and create a focused space for the installation. This soundtrack acts as a tour guide to describing the photos and the implications of the media on this Millennial groups understandings of masculinity.

I believe these two formats work well to combine the image of what it means for Millennials to be masculine due to their personal and possibly anecdotal accounts to my interview questions, but also the symbolism of a portrait completely controlled by their own “masculine” agency. Furthermore, with my academic background in both of these mediums I am confident that they most appropriately give the individualized attention necessary for my project to be successful.

These two formats when combined, as an installation work together as a simplified “brain.” Using the metaphor of the brain has helped me to further develop my project by exploring the theoretical aesthetic of my installation as well as the soundtrack. The installation is in the Q114 conference room of West Hall beside the Kallick Family Gallery. The determining factor in choosing this room is the opportunity to use a space that would not limit my soundtrack atmosphere to
headphones, which I find to be extremely important to the overall aesthetic of my piece because it is meant to be a collective question amongst individuals’ opinions. In terms of the placement of my photographs, I find the window as my “wall” to add an interesting atmosphere and dimension. Rain or shine, sunset or sunrise, this mood setting aspect of the space parallels nicely with the fluidity of the ideas of masculinity I am looking and fighting for with this project.

To further the concept of fluidity, the medium of my photographs are on transparency paper. This medium will further allow the weather to influence the look of my images, and my installation is viewable outside of West Hall, though without my audio component, but it will also hopefully draw in viewers enough for them to come inside and investigate more about my project. After a semester of struggle in terms of finding a large format transparency size, this spring semester features 11x17 inch transparency sheets unlike the fall semester’s 8.5x11 inch.

In terms of the organization of the images on the window, I have decided upon an “eye” format. This format differs from the smaller format of last semester’s (See Figure 1), which in my opinion was too limited, rigid, and incomplete. This semester I believe my installation has finally come to completion theoretically, visually, and as a whole better represents my goal of questioning hegemonic masculinity because I have a larger and more diverse group of individuals. The photographs for the spring semester are much different and less static than the placement of the fall semester. This semester I have the left and right most panels of the windows filled visually, meaning there are multiple hanging layers of transparencies from different sections of the ceiling as well as the window to create
a fluid and flowing effect. The middle panel is the most empty panel, with the two hands of Sean's photographs out front hanging.

To reference my brain metaphor, I want this space to act as the interworkings of an internal and conflicted conversation inside a person's head. The windows act as the eyes through which the viewer can experience the visual meanwhile the audio soundtrack complete the installation by exploring confusion. The soundtrack is key in terms of guiding the audience because from the title of my work alone, unless you are familiar with Muñoz, the goal of the project may not be clear. Hopefully the interviewed voices will recreate, in a more tangible way, the internal conversations that anyone who identifies as masculine has about what they represent or where they belong. This experimental soundtrack uses echo, reverb, delay, panning, and volume manipulations to emphasize and accentuate certain moments, phrases, and words from the conducted interviews that I found to be poignant and revealing to their understanding or confusion with masculinity.
Participants

In terms of recruitment of my participants I fortunately knew the majority of the people so it was not too much of a problem. The main challenge was figuring out our schedule. However, there was one person in particular that was more of a challenge because I did not previously know him. I got to know Kenny through a Facebook note that was sent around the Claremont Colleges. This note, entitled My Gender (See Figure 3) discussed specifically his gender identity and his recent identification as genderqueer, in which he states he is open to those who are “about anything about my gender, feel free to ask me about it, within reason.” Working with Kenny was a mutual opportunity for both of us: for him to express himself through my project in an artistic way that is meant to be a safe space from the mainstream hegemonic understandings of what it means to be a “man,” and for me to get a broader spectrum of what identifying masculinity can mean. I feel he brought great insight into my project because he “never really felt like [he] fit into guy-ness, but [he] just went with it, because [he] thought [he] was supposed to. [He] was socialized as a male—and [he] wish [he] wasn’t, but the worst part was that [he] was COMPLICIT in it.” Thus, Kenny recognizes hegemonic masculinity and how easy it is to conform to media ideals, but he gained the awareness to re-identify, and in my mind as José Esteban Muñoz’s idea of disidentification because he “neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it” (Muñoz 11).

Though Kenny’s case of masculine identity may be the most concrete example of disidentification I found in my project, still, my ultimate goal is to enflesh
a sense of normalcy and acceptance to question one's masculinity—ideally through my pictures—but if not, at least for each individual I work with. Kenny was not alone after completing all of the interviews; at least three other times individuals restated Muñoz's theory of disidentification without even knowing it!

Overall, I think my portraits help convey what it means to be a man today, and I will go through my project photograph by photograph. The following will be a short explanation and analysis of the participants from the fall semester. In Felly's portrait (See Images 1 and 2), I believe the pictures I took represented what he saw as his masculinity, which to him meant strength—physically and mentally. He meant for the shoot to be serious, but realized the moment I captured of him was more true to his character and playfulness. In Nick's series (See Images 3 and 4), his masculine picture represented the struggle growing up as a mixed race individual in the US, which led him to martial arts and the art of fighting as a way of protecting himself. His feminine picture represented a self-awareness with him judging his body in the mirror. Further, he saw this as feminine he could see his similarities to his mother reflected back to him.

Corry's images presented him in the light of what he saw from his father, a man putting on his suit and tie in the morning, and taking care of himself and his family (See Images 5 and 6). Meanwhile, the image of him putting gel in his hair is one of the more feminine things he considers apart of his life routine. Sean's portraits are a bit different than the majority of the series (See Images 7 and 8). He thought about my questions for two weeks, longer than anyone else, prior to our session. His interview lasted an entire hour, where he spoke of the necessity of
combining the co-existence of femininity and masculinity, which resulted in his image of masculinity as the top of his hand and femininity as the bottom. He saw the masculine as tough exterior with knuckles, a representation of masculinity, meanwhile the inside of his hand as the feminine where your feelings are internal like your emotions. Dan's masculine portrait includes him playing the piano (See Images 9 and 10), which he believed to be masculine and strong, meanwhile the image of him with his laundry basket above his head, in his words, mimicked what he had always seen his mother do back home in Korea.

Kenny's images represent some of the most powerful back-story to the series, which we further expanded on because after having done five of the six portraits, I realized it would be important to include audio of each individual's reasoning behind their images—but I only realized this during my last interview (See Images 11 and 12). In deciding his masculine picture, he told me that “when [he] came out as queer [he] realized and thought about a lot how and what that was going to mean for Mock Trial...in Mock Trial [he is] always Mr. Kenneth Moran” instead of Kenny which he sees as more gender neutral. “There is a mode that [he goes] into when [he does] Mock Trial,” it is “an alternate identity that [he] perform[s] because mock trial is a performance anyway.” Thus, for his image he wanted to embody the masculinity he performs in Mock Trial as an attorney during his closing statement. Meanwhile, for the feminine picture, he stated that he “really like[s] makeup and [he] wanted to put makeup on [that day],” and he knew the pictures would encapsulate not only the questions I was presenting in my project, but also exemplifies a milestone in his discovery of and journey with cosmetic
products and the exterior of his femininity (Moran).

The following are just a few of my favorite and most interesting quotes, which were recorded in the interview process. During Nick’s interview he mentioned, “the image of men in movies and magazines have become even more [and] beyond the masculine towards the superhuman, the god. This god-like figure who is perfect and can never be killed; he has a rippling eight pack and beautifully defined muscles. All of the women fawn over him. He seems to know his place in the world. And it’s never existed: you can’t make a king into a god, a man into a deity” (Nañez). I found this to be one of the strongest and most beautifully said ideas in regards to the representations of masculinity in the media and how unrealistic the ideas of what a male body looks like.

Nick, Sean, and Kenny came to similar conclusions in regards to the necessity of the masculine and the feminine to be apart of the same definition: “the essence of masculinity is the same thing as femininity because really men and women are completely the same. It’s just the body through which it projects those characteristics, those feelings are completely different” (Nañez), and “I think that masculine and the feminine they can all exists within the same person” (Pianka). “I’ve come to terms with masculinity but only as a complement of femininity, a sort of yin and yang type of thing” (Moran). These three statements make me wish I had included a question about what each individual thought in regards to the complements of femininity and masculinity. However, I do love the organic nature of the responses and findings for everything said because I specifically did not want to force any types of belief onto my subjects.
The following participants are from the spring semester. Adrien (See Images 13 and 14) considers himself a very gender fluid person and he wanted his photos to be confusing for the viewer, playing with his own presentation of masculinity and femininity. The horizontal picture is technically his feminine picture because he wanted to lounge and show his body’s curvature. He intended for the distinctions between the two photographs to be difficult to interpret. In Briana’s feminine image (See Images 15 and 16) she wanted to emphasize her hips and how curvy she is in her female body. For her masculine portrait she wanted her expression to be very stern and emotionless as well as be in a powerful stance to exert her masculinity. Furthermore, she wanted both of her images to present her personal masculine style of dress.

In Fergie’s photos (See Images 17 and 18) she wanted to show one of the things she considers most feminine about herself, which is her love of getting manicures and doing her nails. Meanwhile her masculine image is meant to show the contrast of her strength, which is considered masculine, along with her small waist and curvy hips. Isael (See Images 19 and 20) wanted to show himself writing in his journal which he carries around with himself at all times so he can write down all of the little things. He also is holding a key chain that has “heart” written on it, which was given to him by a girl that has taken his heart. Isael’s masculine photo features him with his bike and a cigarette, which are two things he considers to be the most masculine of his features because he sees himself as a very effeminate man.

Ishan’s masculine photo is meant to show (See Images 21 and 22)... Jaice’s images (See Images 23 and 24) can be seen as ambiguous in terms of which is
feminine and which is male, which was purposeful just like Adrien’s photos, but he did indicated the image of him showing off his earrings as feminine. This picture was feminine for him because his father and family always considered piercing to be a girlish practice but Jaice preferred to take that form of femininity as a way to rebel. Meanwhile his masculine photo features his hairy chest, which hair to him is manly.

Fortunately, after almost every interview my subjects thanked me for creating this project and approaching them because it allowed them to think more critically about their own identity and masculinity, which is one of my main goals of the project. I believe I successfully started a conversation, though it may just be in small circles of friends, but I trust this project has helped with the broader exchange of what it means to be masculine. This dialogue, in my mind, is easier for members of my generation because with the ever-present bombardment of advertisements, movie posters, and magazines, we have learned to ignore their infiltrations and instead analyze, interpret, and question.

Of the group, we have one Chinese, one Korean, two Mexicans, one Singaporean, one Brazilian, and six American individuals. Those who are not from the United States have added their own critique of American/Hollywood culture in comparison to the media back home, which helps bring an extra perspective. I believe this diverse group has validated a need for a new definition of masculinity that is far different from the hegemonic masculinity that is perpetually portrayed in the media as well as in familial culture.

Furthermore, I believe my audio compilation as well as the presentation of the photographs, together, have created a more collaborative, realistic, inclusive,
and disidentified understanding of masculinity that will define the common sense of the Millennial Generation. Thus, I believe the hyper-sexualized, muscular, and aggressive understanding of masculinity that is portrayed in the media, after this project, is precisely what Gramsci understood to be “good sense” because it is binary, “practical, but not necessarily rational” and it is not rational to claim all individuals who identify as male to exist as this form of masculinity (Hoare 625). Thus, the fluid understanding of “common sense,” in my eyes, has been reconfigured by way of disidentification to change from a hegemonic masculinity to a disidentified masculinity.

The greatest challenge of the production of the raw materials of this project was learning one cannot force the issue of rethinking masculinity onto everybody. Nonetheless, almost all of my participants cared enough to critically about the concepts I presented. Fortunately, plenty of my participants did question and present extremely interesting new dialogues that I would love to see furthered into a greater discussion of masculinity as a whole.
Project Review

My project has changed throughout the past two semesters, but only for the better and in a more refined and concise direction. However, I do believe my project’s intentions have succeeded in the way I originally planned. I did not anticipate having my installation in the Q114 conference room and using transparencies instead of printed photographs, but I believe it has improved my project and it enhanced the fluidity of the notions of masculinity as well as the environment for my work to be presented. Also, in terms of Q114, I think the 3:00-5:00pm timeslot for the gallery exhibition worked perfectly in the fall and the 4:00-6:00pm timeslot will work perfectly for the spring because it allows the audience to see the installation both during the day, towards sunset, and after sunset, where you get to see the migration of the reflection of the images on the walls.

The main challenge I experienced revolved around the pictures. In the fall semester, my main issue was getting 11x17 in sized transparency paper, which ultimately did not come to fruition until the spring semester. Then once the spring semester came my main challenge was figuring out how to arrange the photographs on the window in Q114 in a way that works with my theoretical background and will well represent my participants. Another challenge was recruiting participants and then coordinating schedules. In the spring semester, I knew how to go about recruiting participants, but this semester was more about thinking intellectually, aesthetically, and formally about how I wanted my images and soundtrack to work together in the space as an installation and as an environment that I’ve called the
“brain.”

I believe I have uncovered a new definition and a new Millennial understanding of masculinity that is far different from the form of masculinity portrayed in the media, which is outdated and not a universally accepted form of masculinity due to the oversaturation of stereotypical gender roles and constructions of hegemonic masculinity. Though, as comes with generalizing, the definition does not include everyone, I believe it encompasses a lot more unique identities than most other definitions of masculinities.
Appendix

Figure 1: Fall Mockup

Figure 2: Interview Questions

1. Define masculinity and what is means to you.
2. Describe what the characteristics of masculinity are for you?
3. Have you ever been self-conscious about your masculinity or effeminate characteristics?
4. Do you think the mainstream media, which also could be called the medium through which hegemonic masculinity is reinforced, has defined your masculinity?
5. Do you believe the representations of masculinity of the media has changed in the past twenty years, and if so how?
6. Do you think other generations have questioned their self-identification, and if so, do you believe they had the pressures of outside reinforcements of media to construe their decision?
7. Which media do you think has helped you construct or deconstruct your masculinity (television shows, movies, magazines, advertisements, etc)? If so, what are examples?

8. Do you believe the images of muscular men in the media are unrealistic and photoshopped?

**Figure 3: My Gender:** October 11, 2013 at 2:50pm

“Hey everyone. So apparently it’s National Coming Out Day today and I’ve been meaning to get around to this for a while. A couple years ago I started questioning my gender - very silently. A part of me has always had this pretty powerful fantasy of waking up having always been a girl. For some reason it felt like that would fit more. It’s hard to explain. But, well, I’ve always been good at denial and ambivalence and cognitive dissonance. For a long time I didn’t really acknowledge that feeling as part of who I was. For a long time I didn’t think about my gender. I just kind of... accepted it as it was presented to me by the society around me. But there was always a part of me that knew it didn’t fit. And there was always a part of me that was scared about that. And there was always a part of me that suppressed a lot of my femininity, and that pushed a lot of my emotions really deep inside me.

And that manifested itself in a lot of really shallow but really consistent behavioral quirks that kind of projected this pretty emotionless version of myself that wasn’t entirely authentic, but was at least "male" (the most noticeable of which is probably that monotone... oh, that monotone). It’s kind of eerie looking back on my childhood and seeing how all this developed. I never really felt like I fit into guy-ness, but I just went with it, because I thought I was supposed to. I was socialized as a male—and I wish I wasn’t, but the worst part was that I was COMPLICIT in it.

SO OBVIOUSLY YOU CAN IMAGINE WHY I HAVE A LOT OF COMPLICATED EMOTIONS AROUND THIS SUBJECT.

Some time last year, I started exploring queer identities in terms of my identity. A lot of people exploring feelings like this just identify with the opposite gender, because they think it’s the only other option. To be clear, I don’t want any of this to be construed as disparaging that choice or shaming it as too normative or anything like that. Nobody is in a place to tell someone about their gender except them. They share that same yearning I do about how they envision their bodies and genders, which is why I definitely think I fit under the trans* umbrella.

But something that I’ve always realized - and that probably played a large part in my denying the possibility that I wasn’t a guy for a long time - was that I don’t exactly feel like a woman either. There are a lot of ways in which I identify with pieces of masculinity. I feel like living as a woman would require lying to myself, just like living as a man did. And chief among those aspects of guy-ness that I like is having a penis.
So after exploring these feelings for a while I came to an identity that I felt fit with me - I'm genderqueer. The way I’m using that, it just means that I’m neither a man nor a woman. This summer I finally "came out to myself" and started coming out to friends.

I also decided this summer that I was gonna start exercising some more agency over my appearance. I've been pretty apathetic about how I look for a really long time, and I never really made any choices about how I was going to dress or present. This summer I started buying nail polish and makeup and girl clothes, and experimenting with how I presented myself. Which was a lot of fun. Transitioning is kind of like going through a delayed puberty/tweenhood in some respects, especially when people do hormone replacement therapy, but teaching myself how to do makeup (which is way more complicated than you’d think) is another example of that. And I’ve decided that I really like wearing makeup. Like, I wouldn’t want to leave makeup behind. Or girl clothes, or nail polish. So if you see me around and I look different that’s why.

If you’re like, curious, at all, about anything about my gender, feel free to ask me about it, within reason. I could go on but I think this is a pretty good length so I’m gonna wrap it up here. Thanks for reading yall.

FAQ

- **Are you changing your name?** No, call me Kenny

- **Are you changing your pronoun?** No, still "he", but you can use other pronouns if you want I'm not gonna correct you or anything

- **Are you changing your body?** Thought pretty seriously about hormones because I’d like to grow some boobs but definitely not before graduating. I’ve been waxing my legs and arms but since coming to school I’ve been slacking on that

- **Wait so what's your sexuality?** That’s kind of a silly question, but I’m still bisexual, I like people who are men or women or neither

- **Why didn't you tell me in person Kenny?** IM SORRRRRYYYYYYY really. It’s hard, I’ve been trying though. If I haven’t seen you around that’s probably why. But hit me up we’ll catch up and talk about it.”
Images

Image 1 and 2, Felly

Image 3 and 4, Nick

Image 5 and 6, Corry
Image 7 and 8, Sean

Image 9 and 10, Dan

Image 11 and 12, Kenny
Image 13 and 14, Adrien

Image 15 and 16, Briana

Image 17 and 18, Fergie
Image 19 and 20, Isael

Image 21 and 22, Ishan

Image 23 and 24, Jaicq
Consulted Sources

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*Pianka, Sean. Personal Interview. 16 Nov. 2013
