The Policing of Masculinity Within the Transgender Community

by

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Submitted to the Board of Sociology
School of SUNY Purchase College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College
State University of New York

August 2020

Sponsor: Matthew Immergut

Abstract

Gender identity is a concept that has been grappled with in current society, particularly in regards to how it coincides with pre-defined, traditional gender roles. Increasingly, western culture is relaxing some of these outdated standards and allowing people to live their lives more freely without needing to heavily adhere to being either the physically strong breadwinner or the timid, maternal instinct-driven housewife. We live in a heteronormative society that pressures us from a very young age to conform to specific "idealistic" expectations of men and women through adolescence and adulthood, often referred to as "gender roles". Due to these societal pressures from family, media, and the general public, people who are transgender are more likely to have a difficult time understanding and coming to terms with their own gender identity and expression. With my research, through extensive content analysis of popular film media and social media platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and Tumblr, I aim to highlight the ways in which popular media and the acknowledgement of the validity of the transgender community by well-known individuals (ie. celebrities) can have a positive impact on the mental health and the wellbeing of transgender people, while simultaneously rejecting the damaging ideologies of masculinity and femininity that have been ingrained in our minds from such a young age.

Gender identity is a concept that has been grappled with in current society, particularly in regards to how it coincides with pre-defined, traditional gender roles. Increasingly, western culture is relaxing some of these outdated standards and allowing people to live their lives more freely without needing to heavily adhere to being either the physically strong breadwinner or the timid, maternal instinct-driven housewife. Despite this, however, there continues to be expectations of the transgender community to comply with the extreme models of traditional gender roles in order to be both respected and accepted in society. These pressures have been so ingrained in the public that the compulsion to maintain these standards has not only been internalized by the transgender community, but have also lead to insecurities manifesting in policing others' identities, to the detriment of the community as a whole. In this paper, I will explore how internalized biases and perceived discrepancies to these stereotypes harm one's mental and physical health, and can also lead to the projection of rules onto others in the form of gatekeeping, creating cycles of prejudice and damage.

From my time as a student at SUNY Purchase College and my experiences through social media, I found an overwhelming amount of negative ideology and inter-competition surrounding masculinity within the transgender/gender non-conforming community. Many people who identify as transgender seem to have gone through stages of denial and have struggled to accept their identity. This is likely due to a variety of reasons, stemming especially from lack of exposure to the existence of the transgender community as children; being transgender is not a common topic of conversation for most children, and often general discussions or media portrayals show it as an unacceptable or abnormal lifestyle choice. We live in a heteronormative

society that pressures us from a very young age to conform to specific "idealistic" expectations of men and women through adolescence and adulthood, often referred to as "gender roles". Due to these societal pressures from family, media, and the general public, people who are transgender are more likely to have a difficult time understanding and coming to terms with their own gender identity and expression.

Portrayals of gender roles - and more specifically, the perceived superiority of certain characteristics - have been present in content intended for children even in recent history. In the Disney movie *Mulan (1998)*, portrayals of toxic masculinity are quite prevalent, both in the main character's storyline and the overarching themes in general. A prominent message in the film focuses on what it means to be a man, and simultaneously shows inferiority in being a woman. There are moments of this throughout in reference to both physicality and social status, but one of the most overt messages is in a soldier-training montage to a song called "I'll Make a Man Out of You". The lyrics heavily focus on the physical strength of men, and despite poetic language surrounding this it still includes blatant insults towards soldiers that were not immediately physically strong enough or those that showed fear, and it tells those who falter in their confidence to pack up and leave before going to war. This is concerning, as it openly reduces "being a man" to physical prowess, showing no fear, and a willingness to sacrifice oneself at war without hesitation. By extension, it minimizes women to being physically weak and more suited to staying at home and taking care of the family and the housework. The concept of women being more fitted to taking care of the home is already explored earlier in the film, as Mulan's character is forced into a specific, traditionally feminine role in doing chores, having a particularly feminine appearance, finding a proper husband, and raising children - these pressures

come not only from her family, but from her village as a whole. As a film aimed at children, these ideals can heavily reinforce biases that could already be present in their real lives. In a household where gender roles are the norm, a child may see no issue with these stereotypes and instead it can solidify in their mind that these heteronormative concepts are an acceptable standard. To the film's credit, the final message of the piece is that Mulan, despite being a woman, proves that she is capable of keeping up with her male counterparts and oftentimes her own abilities and willpower allow her to outperform them, ultimately leading to their success.

One could argue, however, that this concept can be interpreted as "even women can be strong like men". Mulan was valued as an autonomous person only after she relinquished her traditional femininity, and took on characteristics of being physically strong and unmoving. This can be damaging to children who perhaps do not see themselves as someone who is physically strong, or do not desire to be this way - it tells young girls that the ability to be respected for your personal strengths is reliant on your ability to first outperform the men around you, and it tells young boys that the only way to be a respectable man is to have a willingness to give yourself to the military and to be physically powerful. In terms of transgender people, these messages can be especially damaging. It includes the concept of "passing" as the gender one identifies with - that one must change their appearance to match the traditional look of cisgender people of that gender. It shows transgender men, who are more likely to be shorter than the average cisgender man or who gain muscle mass differently, that unless they are able to succeed in physical strength or commit themselves to military sacrifice, then they cannot truly be men or achieve authentic masculinity. It shows transgender women that if they pursue physically "passing" as women, then they must submit to a life of housekeeping and child-rearing, to be considered

authentic women. Though these notions are not stated explicitly, this subliminal messaging can become deeply ingrained in the minds of those who struggle with their gender identity, limiting the paths of gender expression, which would lead to insecurities, internalized dysphoria, and the desire to fill specific stereotypes (even when one disagrees with them) for the sake of being accepted in one's community.

Another approach to gender-based storylines in media is through the form of comedy. Unfortunately, the majority of references to transgender people in storytelling uses such characters as the punchline to harmful jokes, often invalidating their identity and mocking someone who is attracted to that character. These transphobic, and typically homophobic, scenarios continue to instill the concept of invalidating gender identities and perpetuate the idea that it is acceptable to mock transgender people. An example of this is in *Crocodile Dundee (1986)*, where the main character, Mick, is in a bar and he speaks with a young woman. Her appearance is elegant, and their conversation is flirtatious. Another man in the bar gets his attention, and tells him that the young woman is in fact "a man dressed up as a girl." Mick approaches the woman again, and, without warning, grabs her groin with the implication that he was checking that her genitals matched with what he was just told would be present. He shouts that she is a man, and the entire bar cheers and claps as the girl runs out of frame, clearly distressed. This bolsters several harmful concepts: that a trans woman is instead a man dressed as a woman, that trans women are men who are trying to "trick" other men into being attracted to them (also known as a "trap"), that transgender people are not deserving of body autonomy, that it is acceptable to reveal that another person is transgender without their permission, and that "passing" as one's gender does not protect one from harrassment and/or assault. The scene is

disturbing, portraying sexual assault as a light-hearted and well-accepted act if the victim is transgender. The actress who plays said character also happens to be a cisgender woman - she is biologically female, female-presenting and -identifying, and dressed in traditionally feminine clothing, and yet, as a character, it is accepted that if her biological makeup were different then it would be permissable to assault her, "out" her to others, and share her personal information without her permission. This tells cisgender people that it is suitable to treat someone in this way, and also tells transgender people that this is something that they can expect nad potentially experience regardless of how well they "pass" as their own gender.

Not every film tackles gender-identity in this harsh of a light, but they can still portray unpleasant gender roles and give unrealistic expectations of "passing" for transgender people. One such film is *She's The Man (2006)*, by DreamWorks Distribution. Taken from William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* comedy, the main character, Viola Hastings, attends a college on a soccer scholarship under the guise of her brother, Sebastian. She does so in hopes to prove herself as a worthy opponent as a female athlete on the men's soccer team, because her team was cut from that playing season. Throughout the film, Viola passes for her brother with ease and one of the side characters develops feelings for her. Even her male roommate, Duke, does not suspect her true identity for even a moment. She encounters, and contributes to, many instances of toxic masculinity from her ex-boyfriend, her new friends and teammates, her professors and coaches, her parents, and others. This relates back to negative stereotypes that men are one-dimensional, physically strong but mentally weak, and sexist, among other traits. Again, trans men are shown that being a man is reliant on those around you acknowledging you as male, and maintaining negative characteristics from damaging stereotypes. This film also paints an unrealistic reference

for how easy it is for trans men to “pass” as cis men. The concept of “passing” in general - to be automatically accepted by others as the gender that they identify as based on appearance - is, within itself, already a complex topic given that it is based entirely on synthetic social constructs of designated gender roles and expressions. For the majority of transgender people, “passing” vitally impacts how they are treated and respected in the world, and ties to both their own self-worth as well as their safety. This film conveys the topic of passing as easy and simple - passing as a man was based only on having short hair, not wearing makeup, lowering your voice, and taking part in actions relating to toxic masculinity - when in reality, for the majority of trans people, the ability to pass may require years of practice, medical aid, or cosmetic surgeries, which is not easily attainable for the average person. Viola uses the false identity of her brother to further her soccer career and to prove a point to her peers, and when this is achieved she reveals her true identity as a female and faces almost zero repercussions for her actions. The film relies on the message that a woman who dresses as a man for personal gain, and then returns to living as a woman when it is convenient for her again, is simple and a safe thing to do, and is in stark contrast to the experience of being transgender in the western world. Transgender people are often accused of being “a man dressed as a woman” and vice-versa, invalidating their identity entirely and ignoring the harsh reality of being transgender. Often, these people must face years of internal turmoil and questioning before coming to terms with their own identity, and even face their own dysphoria for years to come. Whether they are able to overcome that or not, transgender people face backlash, discrimination, and violence from others in society every day on the idea that they are “pretending to be something they are not” or that they are “playing dress-up.” This film contributes greatly to these negative ideologies, along with committing to

the ideas that a short-haired woman who prefers to not wear makeup is only a few steps away from being a man, that being a man is as simple as embracing harmful stereotypes, and that one can freely and without consequence change their gender for personal gain and convenience, a stereotype that is often cited as a reason to disallow altering one's gender identity in the social and the medical world. This also contributes to the undervaluing that some transgender people face if and when they do not or cannot go on hormone replacement therapy or undergo certain surgeries to further their physical transition, and minimises their validity as a transgender person if they do not do so.

Despite what is portrayed in films, these situations do exist outside of fiction and they often have very different endings. A contrasting example of this situation can be seen in 2017 when a transgender teenage boy, Mack Beggs, was forced to compete on the girls' wrestling team in Cypress, Texas (Babb). Mack was taking hormone replacement therapy, testosterone, as a part of his transition, and was harrassed and booed for winning the Texas State Girls Wrestling Title. Many parents and officials said that his victory was unfair because he had an advantage that the girl wrestlers did not. However, Mack had repeatedly asked to be able to compete on the boys' team and was refused indefinitely because of a Texas law that requires athletes to compete as the sex that appears on their birth certificate. He was almost barred from competing at all by one official who did not think his involvement should be allowed, but that request was ultimately denied. This instance alone proves that the sequence of events present in *She's The Man (2006)* do not and would not accurately portray the realities of transgender people as athletes, let alone in everyday life, even if Viola were a transgender man, rather than a woman posing as her brother.

Toxic masculinity is normalized and embedded within the culture of the United States, and there is not enough accessible information or literature on how certain portrayals of masculinity can be very detrimental to our society - and the transgender community in particular - as they are thinking about their place and presentation in society. This topic is extremely important because it brings attention to toxic masculinity and why certain media portrayals and societal expectations can be damaging to one's physical and mental health. In the movie, *Boys Don't Cry (1999)*, the portrayals of a transgender man in Nebraska are unrealistic and harmful to the existing transgender community. Phrases like, "something is wrong with me", or, "I'm just not right/built right" are spoken by the main character, Brandon, who is a transgender man. In one scene, he has sex with his cisgender girlfriend, who isn't aware that he is transgender, and he uses a prosthetic penis that is realistic enough to not be questioned. In actuality, a prosthetic penis that is used for sexual intercourse and is hyper-realistic can be exorbitantly expensive and inaccessible to many people. This is important because the film depicts another scene in which Brandon is binding his chest with bandages, an incredibly dangerous act that is not recommended due to high risks of cracking one's ribs and heavily obstructing one's breathing. He uses bandages because he cannot afford a proper chest binder, which is far less expensive than a prosthetic penis that can be used for intercourse. This is impractical of Brandon as he is characterized as being of very low socioeconomic status. These unrealistic and toxic portrayals of a transgender man harm the transgender community, as well as those watching the film who identify as cisgender, by providing false and dangerous ideas of what it is and can be like to live as a transgender person. It creates the idea that transgender people are born inherently "wrong",

that being respected and accepted as one's true identity can be achieved by "trying hard enough", and that transgender identities are only as valid as their financial situation allows.

Most often, media portrayals through television, news, social media, the internet, etc. portray men and women in a very specific way and hold one another to often unattainable standards. Men are expected and pressured to be muscular, conventionally attractive, tall, and traditionally masculine with deep voices, and to be considered a "better" man they need to be stronger, faster, and cooler than other men. They are pressured to have the most women interested in them or else they aren't "manly" enough. Women are supposed to be, and expected to be, fragile, soft housewives with the "ideal" hourglass figure - a tiny waist, wide hips and butt, and a large chest - to be considered attractive to men. They are pressured to love children with a natural maternal instinct, and their validity as a woman is measured by their ability to find a man who commits to them, finds their perceived flaws as endearing, marries them, and has children with them. Both of these extreme and unrealistic expectations of gender are examples of toxic masculinity in society. Through media portrayals of what is supposedly considered the norm (ie. underwear advertisements (Victoria's Secret), fitness blogs, hygiene product advertisements, any unnecessarily-gendered products (soaps, razors, drinks, etc.), society has carefully cultivated an exhausting list of unreasonable characteristics for the public to adhere to - and transgender people often have a specifically heightened difficulty living up to these strict gender roles. Likewise, Chrys Ingraham wrote about the Heterosexual Imaginary and how men and women are expected to be straight, to want to get married to one another, and to have children. If one does not align with any one of these traits, they can be considered "wrong", "unnatural", or even

"deviant", and may face social ostracization and backlash on social media and from their community.

Through my research, I argue that the presence of toxic masculinity within the transgender community is detrimental to a person's physical and mental health. It affects a person's everyday performance of self and the way that person views themselves in relation to others around them. The transgender community inherently shares overwhelming struggles with dysphoria and the ability to be accepted as their authentic selves, with stereotypes and insecurities that are ingrained in them even as children. These insecurities can at times manifest themselves as anger, turning into projection, which leads to the community heavily policing itself in destructive ways to conform to societal expectations. This is done under the guise of helping people be accepted by conforming, claiming that by not conforming/passing that one will reflect poorly on the rest of the community, or supposedly preventing toxic masculinity from arising. However, the constant regulation of one another creates gate-keeping and competition with each other and within the self. This harms everyone within the community, creates larger pockets of insecurity and self-doubt, and allows transphobic cisgender people to repeat the same harmful rhetoric while claiming that they are trying to help.

PERFORMANCE OF GENDER

Toxic masculinity within the transgender community is damaging to a person's overall wellbeing. It negatively affects a person's self-esteem and the way they view themselves in relation to others around them in social situations. In Goffman's *The Presentation of Self In Everyday Life*, he analyzes the ways in which people present different versions of themselves in

different social interactions and depending on how comfortable they are. There are particularly stark differences to observe within the transgender community - a transgender person will often struggle to act authentically with new people or in a new social environment, based on fears of being misgendered, unaccepted, ostracized, or even put in danger for the desire to be respected as oneself. Transgender people perform different versions of themselves depending on how comfortable they are around different social circles, with especially cautious actions around those who are not aware of their gender identity. By doing this, through verbal and non-verbal communication as well as mannerisms, people are constantly performing gender, whether it is their own or not, depending on the situation, to protect themselves or prove themselves, etc. (Butler).

The "perfect body" aesthetic that is obsessed over both in the fashion industry and on social media is not a reasonably attainable goal for someone who is transgender. These societal expectations affect gender performance in society because transgender people, whether or not to conform, will always experience these pressures to uphold the respected standards when in public and around others, and often when they are alone as well (Butler, Farber). These gender performances can become a constant competition between transgender men and women, cisgender men and women, as well as gender-nonconforming people, which drains one's mental health and energy acting only towards one's detriment.

For transgender women, it can be difficult to reject certain societal expectations of masculinity. Transgender women are often held to a much higher form of femininity because they are still considered to be men in disguise, and to prove themselves to cisgender women and society as feminine enough, they are expected to perform a form of hyper-femininity. For

cisgender women, this can be physically and mentally exhausting - for transgender women, this can be amplified to an unattainable extent, even being fiscally impossible in terms of medical intervention or cosmetic surgery to reduce "masculine-appearing" traits or highlight "feminine-appearing" traits. Even when transgender women abide by societal norms of long hair, makeup, and traditionally feminine clothing, there are times where they still may not "pass as women" to the public eye, and are often subjected to harassment, discrimination, and oftentimes physical danger. The average range for cost of chest/top surgery for "female-to-male" transgender people is from $3,000 - $10,000, while the average range for "male-to-female" transgender people is from $5,000 - $10,000. While there are exceptions to these ranges, depending on insurance coverages, body size, body shape, and desired breast reduction/enlargement size, these cost ranges are not realistically attainable for a decent percentage of the transgender community. It also cannot be overlooked that the range of cost for "male-to-female" chest/top surgery is higher than that of "female-to-male" chest/top surgery. This is only one of the ways in which transgender people may not desire to or be able to undergo medically transitioning, because of the detrimental financial burden that such medical procedures can induce. Still, there are those who believe that transgender people must medically transition, or at least have the desire to do so, in order to be valid in their trans-ness, without considering the inability to do so or the potential financial consequences of doing so.

DESIRED AESTHETICS

The transgender community struggles with self-image to a higher extent than the rest of society, through the constant pressure to fit the "perfect body" standards in an effort to both

effectively attain their own ideals as well as the desire to receive basic respect and acknowledgement from their peers, while endlessly being surveilled, measured, and judged by cisgender people as well as their own community. Many transgender people will struggle with disordered eating behaviors during their lifetime because of this. The ideologies surrounding disordered eating coincide with the culture of exercising and being muscular to prove masculinity, and confidently showing off your body in public or on social media. Transgender men often engage in fitness habits that can be physically unhealthy and mentally draining, and often regulate and restrict what they are consuming on a daily basis because of stigma associated with weight gain. The distribution of fat may not be the same for transgender people as it is for cisgender people, depending on whether or not they are on hormone replacement therapy, or have different structural physiques. These variations potentially contribute to specific body shapes and areas of fat distribution that they are trying to avoid.

'Transing' fitness and remapping transgender male masculinity in online message boards, written by Rebecca Farber, explores the question of male masculinity through online fitness blogs and the physical alterations that accompany it. Farber argues that online blogs and message boards dedicated to fitness are a "trans thing"; something that is a part of being transgender due to the modification of one's physical body and gender appearance. The transgender men who engage in fitness blogs and forums about fitness were doing so to achieve body types that were more congruent with cisgender males' bodies (ie. body size, strength, structure, etc.). Of Farber's seven interviewees, all of them expressed a desire to reach a body type that included broad shoulders, a larger chest/more defined pecs, and visible muscles - all of which are physiques most often associated with cisgender males. They also expressed their

desire for less curves (ie. smaller hips and thighs) and a lower body fat percentage in comparison to muscle percentage. Farber explores the ways that fitness in the transgender male community affects how transgender men view their own and one another's bodies, and their expectations and desires to achieve a traditionally masculine body aesthetic. Along with this, it can be assumed that the transgender men who engage in fitness blogging and intense body regulation do so in an attempt to outwardly portray to others a certain level of masculinity. There is a constant desire for social acceptance and validation from others that the health and fitness online culture can potentially provide for these men, an acceptance and validation that they might otherwise not be receiving in their everyday lives.

RELATIONSHIPS AND SEX

In a study by Judith Kegan Gardiner (2013), Gardiner analyzes how the psychology of masculinity is treated and contradicted in society in regards to men (ie. cisgender and transgender men) and masculine women. Gardiner found through her content analysis that the psychology of masculinity in men, particularly transgender men, was formed in early childhood development. If a man is transgender and is beginning the process of socially transitioning, the ways that he treats the women in his life as well as the ways that he interacts with his peers are also heavily influenced by his early childhood development, and vice versa; the ways in which he was influenced by his early childhood development will be translated in either positive or negative ways through his future interactions with others, particularly his sexual partners and the women in his life. While Gardiner does bring attention to valid points in existing literature, she uses language and terminology throughout her paper that is outdated and problematic (ie.

"female to male transmen," "transgendered," etc.). The use of this language is damaging to the current transgender community and can contribute to further discrimination and misinformation/ignorance in regards to people who identify as such. Despite this weakness, Gardiner's study contributes to my research by highlighting the ways that specific language and social environments can contribute to toxic masculinity within the transgender community.

The Sexual Habitus of Transgender Men: Negotiating Sexuality Through Gender, written by Kristen Schilt and Elroi Windsor, analyzes the ways that body modifications can impact how transgender men view their gender and sexuality. This study argues that people decide who they want to have sexual intercourse with based on the person's gender performance and presentation in society, as opposed to that person's current genitalia. Schilt and Windsor's findings show that transgender men are more concerned about their ideal, outward gender presentations in society rather than their genitalia and body parts in a sexual context. As long as they are comfortable with their physical bodies and the ways in which they present themselves in society, the stereotypes and expectations associated with traditional versions of maleness were not as important to them in these sexual encounters. The study found that the most common body modifications that transgender men desire and pursue are hormone replacement therapy and chest/top surgery. These modifications are viewed as simpler and more accessible ways, in comparison to genital/bottom surgery or otherwise, in which they are able to perform and present their outward male gender in social contexts. The desire to undergo genital/bottom surgery is less prevalent for transgender men who are on hormone replacement therapy, which, in most cases, contributes to a deeper voice and more masculine facial hair, and have chest/top surgery because they are able to pass as male more easily in social contexts. This gives them "cultural genitals".

Schilt and Windsor quote, “cultural genitals” are genitals that are “assumed to exist and which, it is believed, should be there” based on outward appearance,” (741). This highlights the ways in which some transgender men view their gender through certain presentations and performances in social and sexual contexts, while unintentionally contributing to toxic masculinity within the transgender community by reinforcing ideas that transgender people must have a desire to aesthetically achieve certain standards of masculinity or femininity in order to feel and be seen by others as valid.

Methods

Toxic masculinity is very normalized in the culture of the United States - “normalization” referring to the process of desensitizing the population to a concept to the point that it becomes the standard, regardless of logical basis. There is not enough information from existing literature about how certain portrayals of masculinity can be detrimental to one’s mental health - the transgender community in particular - as they attempt to find a place and presentation within society. My research will attempt to bring attention to certain spaces within the transgender community that outwardly present themselves as accepting of all gender identities and expressions and are non-judgmental, and how these spaces unwittingly act as hotbeds for toxic masculinity through their heavy, although sometimes subconscious, policings of gender and competition with one another. Hopefully, this research and research akin to it will prompt ways that we can attempt to eradicate and reject the harmful policing of masculinity in these spaces, to create more accepting and secure environments for the transgender community.

My research will focus specifically on individuals with social media accounts and their posts that center around or speak about the transgender community. It is important to be conscious of the potential impact that social media and the information that people make public can have on themselves and others, especially when such information is coming from well-known sources (ie. celebrities, politically important people, etc.). Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter provide a wide range of access to different representations of the transgender community and those who have personal ties to it. I will be analyzing personal, professional, etc. accounts like these to draw conclusions regarding certain messages that social media gives voice to. The main method that I will be using to collect data will be content analysis of social media platforms. This will be in an effort to pick out and analyze any recurring themes, terms, attitudes, etc. that are used in reference to the transgender community.

Results

Through my extensive content analysis of different social media platforms, such as Instagram (instagram.com), TikTok (tiktok.com), and Twitter (twitter.com), I found that the transgender community that exists on social media is divided into two main subcultures: 1) hyper-positivity and unconditional acceptance, and 2) conditional acceptance. The first subculture, "hyper-positivity and unconditional acceptance," is comprised of the following ideologies: everyone who identifies as transgender is valid in their identity, no matter what or how they feel, people should be spreading love and acceptance outside of and within the transgender community, and nobody has the authority to tell you that you are not valid enough in your transgender identity solely because you do not have the same experiences or desires as

other transgender people may have. The second subculture, "conditional acceptance," falls on the other end of the spectrum, so to say: people are only valid in their transgender identity if they have specific experiences, such as the desire to medically transition by means of undergoing hormone replacement therapy and varying levels of surgery, the experience of some form of dysphoria, or the compulsion to perform strict gender roles based on traditional binaries, and if they do not have these desires then they are not transgender and they should not be claiming to be as such; if one does not experience the same desires or struggles as another transgender person, they are not valid in their trans-ness and they are taking the validity away from those who do.

There is a specific vernacular that exists online that is used to refer to individuals with certain ideals, some of these including terms such as transmed, truscum, and TERF. Transmed, short for transmedicalist, or truscum, are terms used, on social media platforms and within the transgender and overarching LGBT+ communities, in reference to individuals who believe one of or both of the following statements: People must experience a certain amount of gender dysphoria to be transgender, and people must experience the desire to fully medically transition (ie. undergo hormone replacement therapy, varying levels of physical/surgical modifications to their body, a medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria) to be valid in their transgender identity. These terms fall heavily on the ideas of gatekeeping and reinforce very negative expectations and boundaries of the gender binary that transgender people struggle to avoid in their everyday lives. Another term that is prevalent in online discourses surrounding the transgender community is TERF. An acronym for "trans-exclusionary radical feminist," originally coined in 2008, a TERF is used in reference to individuals, more specifically women, who self-identify as feminists but

do not consider transgender women in their discussions or ideologies of feminism. Their arguments are based on the belief that transgender women are not "real women," because of the theory of biological determinism -- the belief that a person's behavior is determined by and directly controlled by their genetics, or at least some component of such (ie. biological genitalia, chromosomes, etc.).

From the Instagram (instagram.com) health and fitness accounts run by transgender men to the Tumblr (tumblr.com) blogs created by transgender youths who self-identify as "transmeds," it is clear that social media platforms provide an intense variety of discourse and opinion surrounding the transgender individual and the community as a whole. Celebrities, such as Miley Cyrus (@mileycyrus on Instagram), Janelle Monáe (@janellemonae on Instagram), and J.K. Rowling (@jk_rowling on Twitter), all have spoken publicly through social media or otherwise about their views on the transgender community. Miley Cyrus identifies as genderfluid, meaning that she feels like she is neither a woman nor a man all of the time and her gender fluctuates throughout her everyday life. She has publicly supported the transgender community through her music, interviews, and social media presence. Much like Cyrus, Janelle Monáe has voiced her support for the transgender community in many ways while also identifying as non-binary, meaning that she feels neither like a woman nor like a man and does not have the desire to present a certain way in society that follows traditional gender norms. Conversely, the world-renowned author of the Harry Potter series, J.K. Rowling, has asserted her disapproval of transgender people and, more specifically, believes that transgender women cannot be "real women" because of their biological makeup. This has led many people to believe that Rowling is a TERF, and whether or not this is true, there have been more than a handful of

times where Rowling has voiced her arguments and opinions against the transgender community online.

Moreover, I have come across a large amount of social media profiles belonging to members of the transgender community, in varying ways (ie. transgender men, women, gender non-conforming people), where their accounts are filled with nothing but positive messages and uplifting words for themselves and their community, whether that be the transgender community or otherwise. Posts about self-love and surrounding yourself with people and things that make you happy and that you care about/that care about you, no matter your gender, your physical body, or anything else that others in society may have told you are negative or bad to be. It has become increasingly clear to me throughout this research that although there is the presence of negativity surrounding the transgender community and its existence, there is also the presence of positivity and love that surrounds the community as well. While it can be difficult to sift through the often overwhelming hatred and gatekeeping that is prevalent on social media platforms, it is important for those in the transgender community to stay true to themselves and to not listen or take to heart all of the unfavorable opinions that exist on these platforms in order to maintain healthy mental health practices.

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