# “Masculinity makes me rebellious”: Exploring the Negotiation of Dutch Trans Masculinities in Relation to Normative Structures

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## Abstract

In much of the existing research on masculinities, transmasculine experiences of masculinity have been insufficiently addressed, or insufficiently complexified. The research that does take these experiences into account, is most often situated in the contexts of the United States, and to a lesser extent Australia and the United Kingdom (i.e. Halberstam, 1998; Jourian, 2017; Abelson; 2019). The aim of this research is to explore how transmasculine people construct their relationship to masculinity and navigate normative understandings of masculinity, both within and outside of trans communities. This research is situated in the under-researched context of the Netherlands. The aim of this study is to not merely include transmasculine people in pre-existing frameworks of masculinity, but to explore how a consideration of transness alters those very frameworks, and may re-shape theorizing on masculinity. This research is based on eight semi-structured in-depth interviews with Dutch transmasculine people, which were conducted digitally. First, how transmasculine people define and construct their relationship to masculinity discursively is addressed. Then, the embodied dimension of masculinity is touched upon. Finally, normative masculinities within trans communities are reflected upon. The central argument of this thesis is that transmasculine people negotiate their relationship to masculinity, and their embodiment of masculinity, in relation to (trans)normative ideas about masculinity. Transmasculine people relate to and embody masculinity in diverse ways, which can hold elements of conformity, subversion, or disidentification. Moreover, their gender expression, and the extent to which they conform to normative masculinities, is dependent on both the particular context that they are in, and their personal preferences. Despite certain commonalities that can be found in the experiences of transmasculine people, this research illustrates that there is no such thing as a singular trans masculinity.


*Keywords:* trans masculinity, embodiment, transnormativity, subversion

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## Introduction

It is now approximately five years ago that I made the decision to start living my life openly as a trans man. After having decided to do so, I experienced a level of freedom that I had never experienced before, as I was increasingly recognized for who I am and was able to express myself in a way that felt comfortable to me. Yet, I soon discovered that my newfound freedom was not without limits. Of course, discovering my place in the world as a trans man did not occur in a vacuum, but affected interactions that I had with other people. As soon as I opened up about my identity as a trans man, and was increasingly being recognized as such by others, I was immediately exposed to normative expectations of what being a man should and should not entail. If I was a man, why did I still enjoy watching Eurovision? If I was a man, why were still most of my friends women? If I was a man, why did I still sit with my legs crossed? The underlying implication of all of these question was that if I "wanted" to be male, I would also have to be masculine. After all, why would I make the choice to transition if not to be properly masculine?

In reality, my own relationship to masculinity was considerably more complex than that. Some of it came naturally to me, some of it I had to get used to, and some of it I wanted nothing to do with. In addition to the questions that others had for me, my newfound freedom also came with countless questions that I had to ask myself – and that I continue to ask myself. What does it mean to be masculine? How do I personally relate to masculinity? How can I embody masculinity in a way that is subversive, but that also feels comfortable to me? What does it mean to be masculine if masculinity at times seems to be inextricably linked to the harmful behaviors of men? These are questions that I still do not always have the answers to, but when reflecting on them, one thing had become clear to me: I had to disentangle the type of masculinity that *I* wanted to embody from the type of masculinity that *other*s expected me to embody.

The tension between what masculinity means to me personally, and what masculinity is constructed and defined as normatively has thus been central to my own experiences with masculinity. I do not merely recognize this tension in my own experiences, but also in the narratives of many other transgender men or (transmasculine) non-binary people. It is precisely this tension, and the ways in which trans people navigate this tension that I am interested in investigating. This research is situated in the particular context of the Netherlands. Studying trans masculinities in this context is especially relevant, because masculinities, and especially trans masculinities, have been sparsely researched in Western-

European, non-Anglophone contexts such as the Netherlands. The vast majority of the existing research is situated in and focused on the United States, and to a smaller extent Australia and the United Kingdom. Moreover, some authors have argued that there is generally a greater tolerance for gender nonconformity and gender diversity in the Netherlands, in comparison to countries in which much work on masculinities has arisen, such as the United States (Bos and Sandfort, 2015). Although this position has certainly been questioned – and rightly so -, the Netherlands has long enjoyed a reputation as a "frontrunner" with regard to LGBTQ+ rights, gender equality and the acceptance of gender non-conformity. This frontrunner position is often exemplified by the fact that the Netherlands was the first country to implement marriage equality, in 2001. The fact that the Netherlands is perceived to be progressive with regard to gender equality and gender non-conformity – regardless of whether this is an accurate representation of reality - makes it a particularly interesting context to study trans masculinities in.

The aim of this research is to explore how Dutch transmasculine people construct their relationship to masculinity and navigate normative understandings of masculinity, both within and outside of trans communities. In this research, I aim to not merely include transmasculine people in pre-existing frameworks of masculinity, but to explore how a consideration of transness alters those very frameworks, and may re-shape theorizing on masculinity. In addition to the main research question, the following sub-questions are central to this research:

- How do transmasculine people define and construct their relationship to masculinity discursively?
- How do transmasculine people embody (or refuse to embody) masculinity in their daily lives?
- What do normative masculinities look like within trans communities, and how do trans people navigate their own masculinities in relation to those communities?

This thesis is divided into three different chapters. These chapters are each structured around one of these sub-questions. In the first chapter, I start off with a discussion of how Dutch transmasculine people define and relate to masculinity discursively, arguing that transmasculine people relate to masculinity in diverse ways, and construct their relationship masculinity in relation or in opposition to normative conceptions of masculinity. In chapter 2, I move from a focus on the discursive dimension of masculinity to a focus on embodiment. In

this chapter, I address how transmasculine people navigate their embodiment of masculinity in their everyday lives, and navigate normative expectations of masculinity while doing so. In similar fashion to argument I make in chapter 1, I argue that transmasculine people can embody masculinity in diverse ways, in which elements of both subversion and conformity may be present. In chapter 3, which is the final chapter of this thesis, I discuss how transmasculine people navigate transnormative understandings and expectations of masculinity within trans communities, while primarily focusing on online communities. In this chapter, I argue that trans communities can be both sites of resistance to normative masculinities, and spaces in which normative ideas about masculinity are produced and reproduced. Before I move to a discussion of each of these three sub-questions, I want to address the methodological approach of this research, as well as the theoretical framework within which my research is situated.

## Methodology

The methodological approach that I have taken to gain insight into my research topic can be characterized as phenomenological, as the goal of this research has been to gain insight into the lived experiences of those I interviewed. According to Christina Goulding, who has written extensively on the application of qualitative research methodologies, an emphasis on lived experience and embodiment is central to a phenomenological methodology. The most important source of data for this research project are the experiences of Dutch transgender men and (transmasculine) non-binary people themselves. As Goulding writes, "with regard to the process of enquiry, the phenomenologist has only one legitimate source of data, and that is the views and experiences of the participants themselves. This in itself assumes that the participant's view is taken as "fact"." (Goulding, 2005, p.302).

The specific method that I employed in this research to gain insight into the views and experiences of the participants is semi-structured interviewing. I conducted 8 semi-structured interviews with Dutch transgender men and non-binary people who were assigned female at birth. These interviews were explorative in nature. This means that it was not my intention to make claims about the Dutch transmasculine population at large. Rather, the goal of these interviews was to gain an insight into the lived experiences with masculinity of Dutch transmasculine people. Because I used semi-structured interviewing as a method, I created an interview guide with specific topics that I wanted to address during the interviews, and questions that corresponded to those topics. The three main topics that were included in the interview guide were (1) the ways in which the interviewees personally define masculinity,

and how they position themselves in relation to masculinity, (2) how normative masculinities are navigated, and (3) (trans)normative masculinities in online trans communities. These core themes were discussed in each of the interviews, but due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, some additional themes were touched upon in individual interviews. The interviews were conducted in April 2021, and each lasted approximately one hour, with the shortest one lasting 45 minutes, and the longest 75 minutes. With the permission of the participants, the interviews were recorded and transcribed at a later date.

Because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted digitally, most of them via Microsoft Teams. Although digital interviewing allowed me to conduct my research in a safe and responsible way during the COVID-19 pandemic, it also came with some challenges and limitations. The first challenge that I experienced was that it is more difficult to establish a relationship of trust with participants because there was less room for informal contact before the start of the interviews than there usually is when conducting interviews in person. Joshi et al., although they conducted a different type of interviews, namely job interviews, have also found that the casual interactions that occur when conducting on-site interviews are largely eliminated when switching to socially distant online interviewing (Joshi et al., 2020). Furthermore, conducting interviews digitally also made it more difficult to interpret body language and non-verbal communication. Other scholars have also found that the transmission of nonverbal cues is less pronounced in online interviews (Joshi et al., 2020; Melis et al., 2021). Technical issues can exacerbate this limitation even more. In one of my interviews, only the audio was working, eliminating the transmission of nonverbal cues altogether. Finally, despite having an interview guide of a similar length as interview guides that I have previously used for other research projects, the interviews for this research generally did not last as long, indicating that online interviewing may have had an impact on how extensively participants elaborated on the various topics that were discussed. There can be several explanations for this phenomenon. This may be the result of lower levels of comfort and trust due to the absence of in-person casual interaction, a result of the fact that online conversations do not always flow as easily, due to experienced difficulties with reading nonverbal cues, or the result of a general fatigue with video calling, as interviews were conducted after an entire year of COVID-19 restrictions. However, I do believe that conducting interviews digitally made participating in my research more accessible, as I got noticeably more responses to this call for participants than I did during previous research projects for which I conducted interviews in person. It may be the case that

inviting a researcher into one's own home, or traveling to a different location, is experienced as a barrier to participate by some people. For some research projects, online interviewing can also be experienced as a barrier for those who do not possess the necessary ICT skills (Melis et al., 2021; Dodds and Hess, 2021). However, because I posted my call for participants in an online community, this was not an issue for my particular research.

**Introducing Participants**

I posted my call for participants in a Facebook group for Dutch-speaking transgender people who were assigned female at birth. Although both Dutch and Belgian (Flemish) people are members of this group, I specifically sought to interview Dutch people, as my research is situated in the context of the Netherlands, and I wanted to stick to a focus on one specific national context. In my call for participants, I explained that I was interested in researching masculinity, and more specifically in how transgender people relate to masculinity and deal with societal norms surrounding masculinity. It was specified that I not only wanted to interview transgender men, but that non-binary people were also encouraged to participate. Initially, more people replied to my call for participants than needed. However, when sending them a follow-up message, some of these people did not end up responding. Therefore, I scheduled interviews with each of the people who had replied to my follow-up message. Initially, I had scheduled 10 interviews. Of these 10 interviewees, I ended up conducting eight, because of two last-minute cancellations that I was not able to reschedule.

Transgender men, non-binary people and gender questioning people responded to my call for participants. Despite the fact that the overall membership of the Facebook group in which I posted the call is relatively young, with many members between the ages of 16 and 25, people of different ages participated in my research. A few informants were in their early twenties, some in their late twenties or early thirties, and a few in their late thirties. The youngest participant was 20, and the oldest participant was 39. With the exception of a few of them, most of the informants lived in or close to urban areas, such as Utrecht, The Hague, or Amsterdam. In terms of race/ethnicity, there was limited diversity among my participants. One of them described their ethnicity as half Hindu. The other interviewees were all white. This may be the result of the limited diversity of the Facebook group in which the call for participants was posted itself, as this group is overwhelmingly white. This limited diversity does impact my findings. It is important to take into account that because the vast majority of my participants are white, much of the experiences that are described in this research are specifically the experiences of white transmasculine people. Among the participants, various

occupations were present, including a teacher, policy-advisor, performer, and student. One of the participants was currently unemployed due to his disability. In this thesis, all of the participants are referred to with pseudonyms. I have given the participants the opportunity to decide on their own pseudonym, which most of them did. For the few participants who did not have a preference for a pseudonym, I came up with one myself.

**Conducting Research from an 'Insider' Perspective**

This research was conducted from an 'insider' perspective in two different ways. The first one is that, just like the participants of this research, I am a trans person who was assigned female at birth. Although there is no way to know for sure exactly how my own transness has impacted the interviews, it is safe to assume that it has allowed me to establish a relationship of trust with the participants of my research. Moreover, being an insider means to have a very good understanding of, and a great deal of knowledge about the topic that you are studying (Bonner and Tolhurst, 2002). Additionally, to be an insider means to speak the same insider language as your participants (Unluer, 2012). Because I am well-versed in all of the terminology that is used within trans communities, for example, participants were able to speak freely in their own words without having to explain the terms that they were using to me. Finally, my insider status may also have contributed to the large number of responses that I received on my call for participants, as trans people may be more likely to contribute to the research of another trans person, either out of solidarity, or because they know that they will not be exposed to potentially ill-informed or intrusive questions by cisgender researchers.

Secondly, as well as being trans, I am also a somewhat active member of the Facebook group in which I had posted my call for participants. Based on the things that I have posted in this group, the participants may have had preconceived ideas about me, although there is no way to know what impact that may have had. Similarly, I was already somewhat familiar with some of the things that the participants referred to during the interviews, as I have previously been exposed to their posts. One of the interviewees I already knew personally, as I had interviewed him before for a different research project. The other interviewees I had not previously engaged with in a one-on-one conversation.

Despite being beneficial in multiple ways, conducting research from an 'insider' perspective does not come without its own risks, however. One of the risks of researching from an 'insider' perspective, or native anthropology, has been described by Abby Forster in

a review of debates surrounding native anthropology: "The unfamiliar is easier to detect (…) and the familiar risks appearing to be true without question" (Forster, 2012, p.16). Just like most of the participants, I am also a white Dutch transmasculine person who is active in online trans communities. This means that many of the experiences that interviewees shared, I can either relate to personally, or sound familiar to me, because other people have shared similar experiences before in online spaces. Being aware of this pitfall has encouraged me to be cautious not to regard certain ideas or responses as irrelevant or uninteresting, simply because they may seem obvious or familiar to me personally. After all, some of the ideas that are familiar to my participants and I, are not necessarily familiar to those who are not trans and/or not members of trans communities, or are not yet described in any literature on (trans) masculinities. Another disadvantage of the 'insider' perspective, which is related to the one I just described, is that the participants *know* that you as a researcher are familiar with much of the topics that they are discussing (Unluer, 2012). As a result, they may not have described their experiences in as much detail as they would have when speaking to a cisgender researcher.

**Analysis**

After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed. The transcription process was aided by the use of Express Scribe Transcription Software. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, which means that they were transcribed word-for-word, capturing every aspect of spoken language, including fillers like "um", laughter, and long pauses. Then, the interviews were coded and analyzed using QRS NVivo, a qualitative data analysis programme. The first step of analysis was to read each of the transcripts in full, without coding. During this step, a broad overview of the topics and themes discussed was gained. Then, the transcripts were read more closely and coded. Each of the transcripts were coded twice, the first time with preliminary codes, and the second time once it had become clear what other codes had emerged in each of the other transcripts. Finally, the codes that had emerged during the previous steps of the analysis were integrated into larger themes and sub-themes. The three main themes under which I categorized most of the codes were (1) normative masculinities, (2) personal relationships to masculinity and (3) masculinity within trans communities.

The process of translation is central to the analysis, and the research process more generally, in several ways. Therefore, I want to briefly reflect on this process here. The first translation, from spoken to written language, occurred when transcribing the interviews. Transcription, although often regarded as such, is not a neutral process. Through

transcription, the interview data are transformed, as "a transcript is a translation from one narrative mode – oral discourse – into another narrative mode – written discourse" (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p.178). Inevitably, a transcript will never be as rich as the interview itself, as when the interview has been transcribed, two abstractions have already taken place: when the interview is recorded, body language and non-verbal communication is lost. When the audio recording is transcribed, tone, intonation, and the natural flow of the interview is lost (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

The second translation occurred when transferring the Dutch-language empirical data to an English-language research project. Despite the fact that this thesis is written in English, all of the interviews were conducted in Dutch, as this was the native language of both my interviewees and myself. This allowed my informants to express themselves as easily as possible, and suits the fact that my research is situated in the context of the Netherlands. Yet, conducting interviews in Dutch also comes with the challenge of translation. Again, I want to emphasize that translation is not a neutral process. When writing in English about a research that has been conducted in Dutch, some of the original meaning will inevitably be lost. The usage of the term masculinity in the English and Dutch languages exemplifies the challenges of translation. Because the interviews have been conducted in Dutch, the word 'masculinity' has been translated to its Dutch equivalent *mannelijkheid*. Although the difference between these terms is minor, *mannelijkheid* intuitively seems to be more directly connected to maleness than 'masculinity' is. When asked to reflect on their relationship to masculinity, interviewees commonly reflected on their sense of being male. Moreover, in English, it seems more common to use words like 'masculine' in relation to people who are not male. For instance, I would argue that sentences like "she is a masculine woman" are more commonly used than its Dutch equivalent "*zij is een mannelijke vrouw*". The differences between the Dutch and the English term were also recognized by a few of the informants, as some of them used *masculiniteit* instead of *mannelijkheid*. This term is not very commonly used in Dutch, but is more similar to the English 'masculinity', and is intuitively not as closely linked to maleness as *mannelijkheid* is. Despite the fact that I translate quotes to English in the main body of text of this thesis, the original Dutch quotes are included in the footnotes, allowing those who are able to read Dutch to access the original quotes.

## Theoretical Framework: Masculinity, Trans Masculinities, and the Dutch Context

My research is situated on the intersection between different sub-fields of gender studies, namely Masculinity Studies and Trans Studies. The emergence of research on masculinities is somewhat of a recent phenomenon within and alongside the field of gender studies (Seminal works include Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1996; Messner, 1997; Anderson, 2010). Much of the early scholarship within gender studies, or women's studies, as it was more commonly referred to, was occupied with making women visible. Mrinalini Sinha, who studies masculinity from a historical perspective, argues that although the 'doings of men' have not been invisibilized in the same way as those of women, masculinity has not been approached as a category of historical analysis (Sinha, 1999). In this sense, the of men have been hyper-visible, but masculinity itself has barely been visible as category of analysis. Therefore, early scholarship on masculinities sought to make masculinity visible as a category of analysis (i.e. Pleck, 1981; Brod, 1987; Kimmel, 1996). Although research on masculinities is conducted from multiple disciplinary locations, much of the scholarship has emerged from within the discipline of Sociology. According to Chris Beasley, theory that arises from masculinity studies is likely to draw from a sociological disciplinary framework, and is likely to be concerned with macro-structural analysis (Beasley, 2013). Although I do draw on the work of authors that utilize the approach that Beasley describes, my own approach is a different one. Instead of drawing solely from a sociological disciplinary framework, my research is situated on the intersection between Masculinity Studies and Trans Studies. As I will elaborate on in the sections that follow, much of the work from Masculinity Studies has insufficiently addressed non-cisgender male embodiments of masculinity. However, this does not mean that such work is unsuitable to use in my own research. By bringing this work into conversation with work from Trans Studies, I am able to build upon foundational work from Masculinity Studies, while approaching masculinity in such a way that non-cisgender male embodiments of masculinity are not only addressed, but are central to my understanding of masculinity.

One of the authors whose work is important to consider for my research is the Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell, who is seen as one of the founders of masculinities research and continues to be an important figure within this field. In this theoretical framework, I discuss her work at length, both because she is a leading figure within masculinities research, and because several characteristics of her theorizing on masculinity are central to my own approach to masculinity, including the understanding of masculinity as

a process, the relationship between masculinity and the body as she sees it, and her concept of hegemonic masculinity. These are all points that will be elaborated on in the following sections. Connell's book *Masculinities* has been especially influential and has sparked an increase in scholarly work on masculinities (Connell, 1995). While she is sometimes seen as one of the leading scholars in the field of masculinity studies, she herself opposes the constitution of a neatly delineated field. When asked about the existence of masculinity studies as a specific field in an interview in 2017, she said the following: "I was worried about the essentialism that appeared very early in discourses about masculinity. That is a serious risk in constituting a field of "men's studies" It tends to isolate the issues about men, and forget that gender is always relational. It can end up, implicitly, as a defense of men's privilege" (Nascimento and Connell, 2017). Because of the inherent complexity of masculinity, Connell argues that it should be researched from a wider field of knowledge, instead of merely from a specific disciplinary location such as Masculinity Studies, Queer Studies, or Trans Studies. To exemplify this point, Connell states that a combination of feminist research on power relations and socialization with arguments from the Gay Liberation movement was central to her contributions on masculinity. She argues that this moving beyond the boundaries of a clearly delineated field such as men's studies is essential to understanding a concept or process such as masculinity.

Connell recognizes that 'masculinity' as a concept cannot be fully encompassed in a brief, clear definition. Yet, in *Masculinities* she does attempt to capture the concept, while recognizing the impossibility of defining it concisely. She describes the concept in the following way: "'Masculinity', to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture" (Connell, 2005, p.71). With this understanding of masculinity, Connell deviates from sex role theory, which was the predominant framework through which masculinity was studied throughout the 1970s and 1980s. According to sex role theory, masculinity and femininity are defined by biological differences between men and women. In Connell's conceptualization, there is a focus on the processes and relationships through which people live gendered lives. Masculinity is not as much studied as an object, but as a continuous process. Masculinity becomes a structure that is defined by social relations, rather than by (assumed) biological differences. In *Masculinities*, Connell thus counters the understanding of masculinity in which it is thought to be inherent in male bodies. This is an

understanding of masculinity that was not only present in sex role theory, but continues to be pervasive in mainstream discussions about masculinity and differences between men and women. Connell calls this understanding of masculinity 'true masculinity'. It is rooted in the idea that masculinity is fixed. Certain actions, traits or behaviors that are commonly associated with masculinity are seen as "natural" to men: Men are naturally not as nurturing as women, men are naturally more aggressive or are naturally more violent. When masculinity is seen as something that is fixed and natural, it is implied that men cannot change, as their behaviors are seen as a direct result of their biology[1]. Connell herself arrives at a different understanding of the relationship between masculinity and men's bodies. This is not an understanding in which the body no longer plays a role, but in which masculinity is not determined by the body. As phrased by Connell, "The body, I would conclude, is inescapable in the construction of masculinity; but what is inescapable is not fixed" (Connell, 2005, p.56). Put differently, masculinity has a bodily dimension, but masculinity is not biologically determined. This idea, too, is central to my own approach to masculinity. Masculinity, I argue, is not the 'natural' result of cisgender male biology. Rather, it is something that all people, regardless of their gender identity or biological sex, can embody. Some people who do not identify with maleness do embody masculinity, and similarly, not all people who identify with maleness *must* embody masculinity. Yet, that masculinity is not biologically determined does not mean that 'the body' or embodiment is not central to the ways in which the informants of this research experience masculinity. This will be discussed in more detail in the chapters that follow.

A central aspect of Connell's theory of masculinity is that its existence depends on its opposition to femininity. Masculinity is dependent on a social order in which men and women are seen as opposite, a social order in which masculinity exists always in contrast to masculinity. As phrased by her, "A culture which does not treat women and men as bearers of polarized character types, at least in principle, does not have a concept of masculinity in the sense of modern European/American culture" (Connell, 2005, p.68). This means that, according to Connell, the existence of masculinity is a result of, and dependent on, the existence of a particular social order. Characteristic of this social order is not only that masculinity is constructed in opposition to femininity, but also that it is constructed in

[1] The commonly used phrased "boys will be boys" exemplifies this. This phrase may be used when a boy engages in inappropriate behavior. By using this phrase, the behavior of a boy (or man) is then positioned as a result of his biology, and is thus seen as both natural and outside of the control of the boy (or man) himself.

opposition or in relation to other structures, such as class and race. As stated by Connell, "To understand gender, then, we must constantly go beyond gender" (Connell, 2005, p.75). Thus, masculinity cannot be understood fully by merely looking at its construction in relation to femininity. This idea is also central to my own approach to masculinity. In chapter 1, for instance, I will address the ways in which the race/ethnicity of my interviewees, as well as their socio-economic background, impacts their relationship to masculinity.

**Hegemonic and Dominant Masculinities**

The concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' is central to Raewyn Connell's theory of masculinity. This concept was first introduced in the 1980s, but was formalized by Connell in *Masculinities*. Since *Masculinities* was first published, this concept has been used in numerous works on masculinity, and has been applied to a variety of contexts. Most work on masculinities that has emerged since Connell introduced the concept has utilized it, or at the very least referenced it. Hegemonic masculinity was inspired by the concept of 'hegemony', a concept which was introduced and used by Antonio Gramsci to analyze class relations. With hegemonic masculinity, Connell applies this concept of 'hegemony' to gender relations. Connell and Messerschmidt have described hegemonic masculinity as "the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue" (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p.832). The idea that there is a hierarchy of masculinities, which is central to hegemonic masculinity, comes from the experiences of bisexual and homosexual men who have been met with prejudice and violence from heterosexual men (Connell, 2005). These experiences have thus been pivotal in the development of hegemonic masculinity. As a concept, hegemonic masculinity has several uses. The first one is that it can be used to theorize power relations between men and women. The second one is that it can be used to theorize power relations and hierarchies between groups of men. It has long been recognized that there is a large diversity in masculinities, and that masculinities are therefore always plural. For Connell, hegemonic masculinity can be a useful concept in understanding the relations between different embodiments of masculinity. According to her, these can be relations of dominance, subordination, complicity, or alliance (Connell, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity has sometimes been misunderstood as a type of masculinity that is "normal" in a statistical sense. This is far from the truth. In reality, most, or perhaps even all men, deviate from hegemonic masculinity in some way or another. Hegemonic masculinity is thus not the most common embodiment of masculinity, but a normative idea of what the "ideal" man is to look like in a certain time and place. Although it

is often used as such, hegemonic masculinity does not refer to a static character type. Just like there is not one constant, universalized masculinity, the same can be said for hegemonic masculinity. Central to Connell's understanding of this concept is the fact that relations of hegemony are not static, but always subject to change over time.

Because hegemonic masculinity refers to a culturally dominant ideal, it is a useful concept for the purpose of my own research, as the focus of my research lies with how transmasculine people negotiate and navigate normative understandings of masculinity. Yet, because of its macro-level, structural, approach to masculinity, merely using this concept would not allow me to accurately describe the complex ways in which transmasculine people relate to masculinity and embody masculinity in their everyday lives. Therefore, I distinguish between hegemonic and dominant masculinities, inspired by the work of the Australian scholar Tony Coles. As Coles writes,

> "The concept of hegemonic masculinity as the descriptor of the culturally dominant ideal only takes into consideration dominant and subordinate/ marginalized masculinities at the structural level without taking into account men's lived realities of their own masculinities as dominant in relation to other men, despite being subordinate in relation to the cultural ideal." (Coles, 2009, p.30).

What Coles gets at here, is that there can be a difference between hegemonic masculinities and dominant masculinities. According to Coles, a man does not have to conform to hegemonic masculinity to be in a dominant position in relation to other men. It is possible to be subordinated by hegemonic masculinity, but to at the same time assume a dominant position in relation to other men within specific sub-cultures. A gay man, for instance, may be marginalized in relation to hegemonic masculinity, but can embody masculinity in a way that is dominant and/or normative among gay men. If hegemonic masculinity refers to a single form of masculinity that is culturally dominant, it thus cannot be used to adequately address the complexities of multiple dominant masculinities (Coles, 2009). As Coles argues, hegemonic masculinity in useful in describing dominant masculinities at a structural level, but not as much in describing the ways in which people negotiate masculinities in their everyday lives, and the relationships between men who do not meet the culturally dominant ideal. Because 'dominant masculinity' is better suited to describe the complex ways in which

people navigate masculinities in their daily lives, I use both 'hegemonic masculinity' and 'dominant masculinity' to support my arguments, at various points throughout my research.

As is the case with any widely referenced and applied concept, hegemonic masculinity has also been criticized for numerous reasons. One of these criticisms is articulated by Chris Beasley, who argues the way in which Connell perceives power leads to a homogenization of groups of men. According to Beasley, Connell conceives "power as structural, as macro-oppression (patriarchy), imposing upon subjects to produce a hierarchical pyramid of masculine identity groupings." (2012, p.116). Examples of such group identities which appear in Connell's framework are hegemonic, subordinated, and marginalized masculinities. These different group identities are defined in widely homogenous terms. These identities are then reduced to actual groups of men, leading to a further homogenization and oversimplification of masculinities.

Another criticism of Connell's theory of masculinity is that it can lead to the conflation of masculinities with maleness. As mentioned before, Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as "the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue" (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p.832). The risk of this approach, in which hegemonic masculinity is seen as a pattern of practice that is directly tied to the dominance of men over women, is that masculinity becomes understood as 'what men do.' Sofia Aboim phrases this criticism in the following way:

> "Individuals embody masculinity from a particular place, enact masculinity as it is embodied and live with the effects of the masculinity they contribute to reproducing and shaping at the interactional and structural levels of society. In the end, masculinity would be what men do." (Aboim, p.227)

If we follow Aboim's analysis, and masculinity indeed becomes what men do, this risks conflating masculinities with maleness or the category of men. Moreover, because hegemonic masculinity is directly linked to the dominance of men over women, it is unclear how non-binary masculine people are position in relation to this binary framework. The question that thus remains to be asked is: what is the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and non-cisgender male, and especially non-binary, embodiments of masculinity? If hegemonic masculinity is directly tied to patriarchy, to men's dominance over women, what place do non-cisgender male people with a masculine embodiment hold in this framework? As Connell herself argues, all masculinities are constructed in relation to hegemonic masculinity.

But, if hegemonic masculinity is a normative notion of what the "ideal" man would look like, how do people who are masculine, but not cisgender male, exist in relation to this notion? In her work, Connell does recognize that masculinity can also be embodied by women or transgender men. On the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and transgender men, Connell and Messerschmidt say the following: "the masculinities constructed in female-to-male transsexuals' life courses are not inherently counterhegemonic. Self-made men can pursue gender equality or oppose it, just like non-transsexual men." (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p.851). They thus argue that trans men have a similar relationship to (hegemonic) masculinity as cisgender men. The tension between the potential subversive or counterhegemonic qualities of trans masculinities, and the potential for trans masculinities to conform to, or reinforce, gender normativity is central to my own research, and will be addressed extensively in the chapters that follow. In my discussion of this tension, the experiences of non-binary trans people are included. Although Connell and Messerschmidt address the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and binary-identifying transgender men, the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and people who do not self-identify as male remains unaddressed in their work.

**Female and Non-cisgender Male Masculinities**

There is, however, also a body of work in which non-cisgender male embodiments of masculinity are discussed extensively. Jack Halberstam is perhaps the most well-known and widely recognized scholar that has done research on non-cisgender male masculinities. His book *Female Masculinity* was first published in 1998 and continues to be one of the most referenced works in research on non-cisgender male embodiments of masculinity. In *Female Masculinity*, Halberstam aims at "conceptualizing masculinity without men" (Halberstam, 1998, p.2). According to Halberstam, masculinity has too often been reduced to the expression of maleness. To conceptualize masculinity without men, means to recognize that female (or non-cisgender male) embodiments of masculinity are not simply imitations of maleness, but that studying female masculinities "affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity" (Halberstam, 1998, p.2). Whereas authors such as Connell, Anderson and Kimmel have mostly studied masculinity in relation to cisgender men, Halberstam is thus more interested in studying alternative, non-cisgender male embodiments of masculinity.[2] In *Female Masculinity*, Halberstam addresses a limitation of the body of

[2] Halberstam refers to these masculinities as female masculinities. With this term, he not only refers to masculine cisgender women, but also to binary transgender men and transmasculine non-binary people. In this day and age, I would not use the term 'female masculinity' as a term which included transgender men and

work on masculinity that existed when he was writing his book. This limitation is that there not only seems to be little interest in studying masculinity without men, but also that masculinity has oftentimes simply been conflated with maleness. Although these are two different concepts, they are often treated as one and the same. According to Halberstam, the fact that much of the existing theory on masculinity focuses solely on masculinity in relation to the (cisgender) male body signifies "a gap between mainstream discussions of masculinity and men and ongoing queer discussions about masculinity, which extend far beyond the male body" (Halberstam, 1998, p.13). Although over twenty years has passed since Halberstam first wrote *Female Masculinity*, this limitation is still easily recognizable when looking at much of the current scholarly work on masculinity. Most of this work remains merely focused on cisgender male embodiments of masculinity, whereas queer and trans discussions of masculinity outside of (and increasingly within) academia move beyond this narrow focus. My own work aims to fill this gap in the existing scholarship by focusing on transmasculine experiences of masculinity, and bringing trans perspectives on masculinity in conversation with the existing body of work in masculinities research.

Halberstam argues that masculinity is its most transgressive when it is delinked from the (cis) male body, and that therefore, there is much to gain from studying masculinity in this context. According to him, female masculinities are not merely something to be discussed in addition to cisgender male masculinities. Rather, masculinity cannot be fully understood without a consideration of female masculinity. Understanding female masculinities is thus integral to understanding masculinity more generally. This is where Halberstam's approach to masculinity undoubtedly differs from the approaches of authors like Connell. They have perhaps recognized the existence of non-cisgender male embodiments of masculinity, but have not made such embodiments an integral part of their theories and/or models of masculinity. Since *Female Masculinity* was published, the number of scholarly works that has considered non-cisgender male embodiments of masculinity has increased. A large portion of these works have been empirical in nature (e.g. Green, 2005; Koenig, 2003; Abelson, 2019). Such works have made transgender male experiences of masculinity visible, adding to the existing body of work on masculinity in which such experiences have long been unaddressed. Yet, some of the scholarship that has addressed non-cisgender male embodiments of masculinity has still done so in an unsatisfactory way.

transmasculine non-binary people. Therefore, I refer to these masculinities as non-cisgender male masculinities instead.

Although authors may recognize that masculinity is not inherently tied to cisgender male biology, it is oftentimes not decoupled from the category of "men". This means that in research on trans masculinities, the focus usually lies solely with binary transgender men. An example of such work is *Men in Place: Trans Masculinity, Race, and Sexuality in America*, written by Miriam Abelson. In this book, Abelson aims to show that (trans) masculinities are always spatially constructed, and that the spaces and places that trans men inhabit shape their experiences of gender, race, and sexuality. In doing so, Abelson does not only aim to bring the experiences of transgender men to the forefront, but also uses the particular "case" of transgender men to illustrate changes in normative ideas of masculinity in American society more generally. This work does contribute to the denaturalization of the idea that masculinity is inextricably linked to cisgender male biology, but fails to truly move beyond an understanding of masculinity in which it is something that is embodied by men, rather than something that can be embodied by people regardless of gender identity. While Abelson acknowledges that masculinities can be embodied by anyone, and that not only transgender men, but also non-binary people and women can practice trans masculinities, the focus of her book continues to lie solely with transgender men. It is also assumed that those men automatically embody masculinity in some way or another, simply because they are men. What thus happens in works like Abelson's, is that transgender men are placed in a conventional masculinity studies model. Abelson acknowledges this in the introduction to her book, by saying that she is drawing on the theories of masculinity that are associated with the work of Raewyn Connell. The added value of works like Abelson's may be that masculinity is studied from the perspective of transgender men instead of cisgender men. By focusing on transgender men, Abelson illustrates that not only cisgender men, but also people that are assigned female at birth can practice masculinities and have diverse relationships to masculinity. In a way, such works are transformative, as masculinity is delinked from the cisgender male body. Yet, the understanding of masculinity that runs through these works is not significantly different from the understandings of masculinity that can be found in most work on masculinity. Therefore, the potential for research on masculinity to move beyond the male body is therefore not reached in works like these. Although Miriam Abelson's "Men in Place" is only one example, it is representative of a larger body of work on transgender masculinities that has arisen from the fields of sociology and masculinity studies. One of the questions that has thus far remained unaddressed in much of this work is the question of what transness does to masculinity: How do trans experiences of masculinity impact our understanding of masculinity? The aim of my own research is not to merely include

transmasculine people in pre-existing frameworks, but to explore how a consideration of transness alters those very frameworks, and may re-shape theorizing on masculinity. This approach to studying trans masculinities more closely resembles to that of Jack Halberstam, as like Halberstam, the goal of this research is not to place transgender men and non-binary people in a conventional masculinity studies model.

Although there is a need for more research on non-cisgender male embodiments of masculinity, such research can also run the risk of reification and oversimplification. Raewyn Connell has pointed to the risk of oversimplifying masculinities, and treating masculinity as it embodied by people from certain sub-groups as a uniform category. She elaborates as follows:

> "With growing recognition of the interplay between gender, race and class it has become common to recognize multiple masculinities: black as well as white, working-class as well as middle-class. This is welcome, but it risks another kind of oversimplification. It is easy in this framework to think that there is a black masculinity or a working-class masculinity." (Connell, 2005, p.76)

In the same way that there is no uniform black masculinity or working-class masculinity, there is also no trans masculinity. Saying that masculinities are always plural does not only mean that there can be a difference between white masculinity and black masculinity, rural masculinity and urban masculinity, or trans masculinity and cis masculinity, but also that those sub-categories cannot be treated as uniform categories at all. Therefore, I want to be careful not to argue that there is such a thing as trans masculinity, as a type of masculinity which is inherently different from cis masculinity, and which is defined by a number of characteristics which every person who considers themselves to belong to this group shares. Nonetheless, this does not mean that no commonalities may be found in the ways in which transmasculine people relate to masculinity. Examples of such commonalities might be that most transmasculine people denounce certain characteristics that are commonly associated with masculinity, such as denigratory behavior towards women, and an inability to express emotions. Both of these examples will be addressed in more detail in chapter 2.

A common pitfall that occurs when trans masculinity is characterized as a sub-category of masculinity, is that it is at times positioned as either inherently subversive of gender normativity, or as a reinforcement of gender normativity. With the

recognition that trans masculinity is not a uniform category, also comes the recognition that trans masculinities are not necessarily *inherently* either of these two things. I would argue that trans masculinities indeed have the potential to subvert gender normativity, but that the reverse is also true. Trans masculinities are not inherently subversive or gender normative, as is the case with any embodiment of masculinity. A transmasculine embodiment of masculinity can be complicit with gender normativity, while a cisgender embodiment of masculinity may subvert the status quo. Because masculinity can be (and *is*) embodied in a myriad of different ways, it cannot be captured in a single category, model or description. Reality is always too complex to be fully understood through oversimplified categorizations which attempt to capture that reality. Therefore, attempts to categorize masculinity or create models of masculinity will always fall short in some way or another.

That does not mean, however, that it becomes impossible or futile to study trans masculinities. According to Aboim et al., conducting research on trans masculinities remains important because studying masculinity in a context in which it is not naturalized as originating from the cisgender male body, can be beneficial in trying to understand what masculinity actually is (Aboim et al., 2018). Furthermore, transmasculine people have often constructed their masculinities in a much more conscious way than most cisgender men, and may have spent more time reflecting on what being masculine means to them. Whereas cisgender men have been socialized and enculturalized as male from the moment that they were born, the majority of transmasculine people have initially been socialized as female. As a result, a relationship to, or embodiment of masculinity, is not as much a 'given'. This makes studying masculinities by focusing on trans embodiments of masculinity especially fruitful.

**Introducing Transnormativity**

When studying trans embodiments of masculinity in relation to normative structures, a concept that is useful to consider is Austin H. Johnson's concept of transnormativity. Transnormativity as a concept was first introduced by Johnson in his article "Doing Cisgender Vs. Doing Transgender: An Extension of Doing Gender Using Documentary Film" (2013). Using documentary films as a case study, Johnson developed this concept further in his article "Transnormativity: A New Concept and Its Validation through Documentary Film About Transgender Men" (Johnson, 2016). In this article, Johnson defines transnormativity as

> "A hegemonic ideology that structures transgender experience, identification, and narratives into a hierarchy of legitimacy that is dependent upon a binary medical model and its accompanying standards, regardless of individual transgender people's interest in or intention to undertake medical pathways to transition" (Johnson, 2016, p.465-466).

According to him, it is an ideological structure to which transgender people's expressions and experiences are held accountable. Although transnormativity itself may be a relatively recent concept, Johnson recognizes that it is drawn from the terms 'heteronormativity' and 'homonormativity', which are both ideological structures through which some experiences are legitimized, and others are marginalized. As Johnson writes, transgender experience is structured into a hierarchy of legitimacy. This means that those who comply with the transnormative standards, are seen as the most legitimately trans, whereas those who deviate from what is normative may be seen as not "trans enough". Johnson's conceptualization of transnormativity is generative for grasping how transmasculine people negotiate their masculinities in relation to normative structures, especially within trans communities. Although elements of transnormativity are present throughout this entire thesis, I will return to this concept at length in chapter 3, when discussing masculinities in relation to trans communities.

**Masculinities in the Dutch Context**

Most of the authors that I have cited thus far have conducted research in the United States, the United Kingdom, or Australia. The majority of the existing theory on masculinities originates from these Anglo-American contexts, predominantly from the United States specifically. Because masculinities are always constructed in a particular context, theories of masculinity that originate from one specific context must always be evaluated critically when applied to another context. However, work that is situated in a Western European context, or the Dutch context specifically, is much more limited. Much of the work that does exist focuses on themes that are not applicable to my own research, such as migrant masculinities (i.e. Haile and Siegmann, 2014; van Huis, 2014), or historical constructions of Dutch masculinities (i.e. Dudink, 2012). There is not yet any scholarship trans masculinities that is

situated in the Dutch context, making my own research a valuable contribution to the existing body of research on Dutch masculinities.

Although some differences may be found, it is important to acknowledge that because there is no such thing as a singular masculinity, there is also no such thing as Dutch masculinity as a singular category. What is seen as normative may, however, differ between different national and/or cultural contexts. Some things that may be normatively masculine in one country, might not be as closely associated with a normative masculine embodiment in another. As mentioned before, there is limited research on masculinity in a Dutch context. Yet, some comparative research has been done on the ways in which gender more generally differs between an American and Western European context. As put forward in a comparative study between Sweden and the Netherlands, both countries enjoy the reputation of being centers of sexual liberation and enlightenment (Segal, 2020). It is assumed that in both of these countries, there is a certain casualness about sex and gender that is not as present in countries like the United States and Canada. Yet, Segal argues that reputation does not correspond to the lived reality of Dutch and Swedish people. They argue that despite this reputation, "gender normalcy is a powerful social doctrine" in both Sweden and the Netherlands (Segal, 2020, p.191). According to this study, The Netherlands is a society in which normalization is a strong force. This appears in all facets of society.

**Gender and Coloniality**

I argue that Dutch masculinity cannot be understood without a consideration of coloniality, as what is normatively masculine is closely linked to whiteness, and has historically been constructed in opposition to the colonized "Other". Postcolonial scholars have drawn attention to the idea that masculinity is not only constructed in opposition or relation to femininity, but also in relation to the colonized "Other". On this coloniality of masculinity, Desi Dwi Prianti says the following:

> "I argue that masculinity itself is both a colonial legacy, and an overtly western notion. Looking back to the origins of masculinity in western society, masculinity has indeed been a project that relies on individual personhood, and has been expressed via the need to distinguish between the self (male subjects) and the other. It is also manifested in the need to conquer and silence others, who were perceived to lack masculine characteristics, such as female and colonized subjects." (Prianti, 2019, p.701).

Here, Prianti argues that Western conceptions of masculinity cannot be understood without an acknowledgment of its colonial roots. When speaking about gender and masculinity in the Netherlands, this coloniality of masculinity is also particularly relevant. According to Prianti, masculinity and the hierarchical structure between the gender categories of men and women were introduced in Indonesia during the Dutch colonial period. Dutch masculinity was constructed in opposition to women, but also in opposition to the colonized "other". During this period of colonization, Indonesian men were seen as effeminate, because the pre-colonial notion of personhood in Indonesia was very different from a Western, or Dutch, notion of personhood. It was expressed through sharing, mutuality, and caring. Dutch masculinity was constructed in opposition to these characteristics, as these were associated with femininity (Prianti, 2019). Gloria Wekker argues that during this colonial era, black sexualities and genders were banished from the "realm of the respectable" (Wekker, 2020, p.145). This realm of the respectable is characterized by whiteness. This remains relevant to conceptualizations of masculinity today, as the history of masculinity carries on into the present.

## Conclusions

In this introductory chapter, I have introduced my research questions and elaborated on my methodological considerations. Moreover, I have addressed some of the existing work on masculinities that has arisen from both Masculinity Studies and Trans Studies, and have laid the theoretical groundwork for the chapters that follow. I have shown that much of the existing work on masculinities has insufficiently addressed non-cisgender male experiences of masculinity, and particularly the experiences of (transmasculine) non-binary people. Furthermore, it has become clear that there is limited research on Dutch masculinities, and research on trans masculinities specifically does not yet exist in the Dutch context. In the following chapter, I will move to a discussion of the findings of my own empirical research, in which I address both non-cisgender male embodiments of masculinity, and the particularities of the Dutch context. In chapter 1, the ways in which transmasculine people define masculinity and relate to masculinity discursively will be discussed. By bringing theory and existing empirical research in conversation with my own empirical research, I hope to arrive at a more complex understanding of the ways in which transmasculine people negotiate their masculinities.

# Chapter 1: Dutch Hegemonic Masculinity and the Discursive Construction of (trans) Masculinities

In the introduction of this thesis, I situated my own theoretical approach in relation to existing scholarly work on masculinity. Naturally, the understanding and everyday experiences of masculinity that transmasculine people have does not have to correspond to how it is discussed in a scholarly setting. This is especially the case because in much of the existing theory on masculinity, non-cisgender male experiences of masculinity are insufficiently taken into account, or insufficiently complexified. Therefore, I take how my informants themselves define and relate to masculinity as a starting point in this chapter, in order to arrive at a more complexified understanding of the relationships that transmasculine people have to masculinity. In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which Dutch transmasculine people themselves personally define masculinity, and construct their relationship to masculinity discursively, arguing that they relate to masculinity in diverse ways, and that they do not developed an understanding of masculinity or relationship to masculinity that is completely separate from dominant masculinities and the characteristics that they associate with such masculinities. The ways in which this research's informants position themselves in relation or in opposition to normative constructions of masculinity is thus a central aspect of this discussion. Here, I draw on José Esteban Muñoz's concept of disidentification to describe a way in which transmasculine people construct their masculinities discursively in a way that is neither characterized by full subversion, nor by full conformity to hegemonic masculinity.

## Defining Masculinity

One of the first questions that I asked each of the interviewees was what they think of when they hear the word 'masculinity'. For many of them, certain norms or stereotypes about masculinity were what first came to mind. In other empirical research on trans masculinities, hegemonic masculinities are also what was first discussed when asking transmasculine informants to reflect on masculinity (e.g. Jourian, 2017; Green, 2005). These norms or stereotypes were all associated with cisgender male embodiments of masculinity. Although there were large differences in the ways in which informants personally relate to masculinity, as will be discussed below, there were many commonalities in the characteristics that occurred to them when thinking about masculinity. Interviewees named several characteristics that they associated with (hegemonic) masculinity. In terms of gender expression and behavioral characteristics, a lack of being able to express emotions or communicate about feelings was commonly associated with masculinity by informants. For

Roan, a 30-year-old transgender man, this was what first came to mind when discussing what masculinity meant: "the first thing that I think of is that you have to be tough, be strong and don't talk about what you're feeling, but be… I would almost say a bit superficial." This sentiment was echoed by most of the other interviewees. Another characteristic that Bob, Roan and Lucas associated with masculinity was what Roan described as "you need to have it all figured out." What this could be interpreted as, is that the "ideal" man should always be in control, and should have a successful life. This successful life is, according to many of the interviewees, characterized by having a good job, a nice car, and a family for which you are able to provide financially. In addition to these characteristics, interviewees also associated certain physical characteristics with masculinity. What was named the most in terms of physical characteristics, is that the "ideal man" should be thin, muscular, and tall. Roan added that this ideal man is also usually white. What each of the characteristics that informants associated with hegemonic masculinity have in common, is that they are not dependent on cisgender male biology. Each of the interviewees recognized that there was a difference between masculinity and maleness. Lucas, a 20-year-old student from Amsterdam, articulated this in the following way:

> "Well I think that a man can also be feminine and that that doesn't automatically have something to do with someone's gender or how someone identifies, I think it's more of a form of expression, how you behave yourself… yeah, express [yourself]."[3]

Lucas thus clearly distinguishes between gender identity (maleness) and gender identity (masculinity). Trans activist and scholar Jamison Green has also done qualitative research on the ways in which transgender men perceive and think about masculinity (Green, 2005). One of the questions that he asked his informants was whether masculinity and maleness are the same thing, a question which was universally responded to with a clear "no." Among his interviewees, there was an understanding that it is not only men who can express masculinity, and that men do not necessarily have to express masculinity or have a masculine embodiment. Yet, when he asked the same people the question "Where does masculinity come from?", his interviewees suggested that "masculinity comes from a person's ability to

[3] Original: "Nou ik denk dat een man ook vrouwelijk kan zijn en dat dat niet meteen te maken heeft met iemands gender of hoe iemand zich identificeert, ik denk dat het meer een soort uitingsvorm is, hoe je jezelf gedraagt… ja, uitdraagt."

correlate his or her behaviors and/or actions with those expected from people with male bodies" (Green, 2005, p.296). Even though his informants recognized that masculinity is not dependent on the possession of a cisgender male body, they did think of masculinity as something that is very closely linked to the behaviors and expressions that are associated with men. The same can be seen in my own research. While the interviewees did not link masculinity to specific biological characteristics, such as having been born with a penis, masculinity as they described it *was* strongly connected to the behaviors and expressions of men. The particular usage of the word 'masculinity' in Dutch may also have contributed to the fact that interviewees connected masculinity very closely to men or maleness. As I have reflection on in the methodology section of this research, the Dutch term 'mannelijkheid' seems to be more closely linked to maleness than the English term 'masculinity' is.

Although there was considerable overlap in what characteristics informants associated with masculinity, it would be an oversimplification to think that the Netherlands is one uniform culture with one overarching masculine ideal. What is seen as normatively masculine differs from person to person, and from context to context. This was illustrated by a few of the interviewees. Arthur, a 39-year-old transmasculine non-binary person who lives in Amsterdam, for instance, argues that what dominant masculinities look like is dependent on someone's socio-economic status, and the neighborhood or part of the country in which they reside: "It depends a bit on your socio-economic position, I think, because *grachtengordel* masculinity is not the same as rural masculinity, or the type of masculinity that can be found in *Amsterdam Zuidoost*."[45] He goes on to describe that the masculine ideal in the Zuidas, a high-end business and financial district in the south of Amsterdam, might be to wear Armani suits, have neatly cut hair, and talk about women with your colleagues. In other neighborhoods, the norm might be to embody a more physical, "macho" type of masculinity. Speaking of differences in what is seen as normative, Dirk, a 35-year-old transgender man, points out that men and women may also have different ideas about masculine ideals:

> "A woman would be more likely to say that a man needs to be courteous, whereas a man would, for example, say that men are

[4] Original: "Ja ligt een beetje aan welke sociaal-economische laag je zit denk ik, want een grachtengordel man of grachtengordel mannelijkheid is niet hetzelfde als boeren mannelijkheid of Zuidoost mannelijkheid."
[5] The term *grachtengordel* refers to Amsterdam's Canal District. This is an upper-class, predominantly white, neighborhood. *Amsterdam Zuidoost* refers to the area in the Southeast of Amsterdam. This neighborhood has a larger working-class population is known to have a diverse population in terms of ethnicity and nationality.

> not allowed to show emotions. Those do not exclude each other, but there's a different focus."[6]

Here, Dirk thus suggests that what is seen as normative, or as "ideal", not only depends on the socio-economic, spatial, or historical context in which someone is situated, but that it can also depend on one's gender identity.

Additionally, I also discussed the relationship between masculinity and race/ethnicity with my informants. It is interesting to note that when asked to reflect on the ways in which race or ethnicity impacts norms regarding masculinity or their own personal relationship to masculinity, almost all white interviewees proceeded to talk about non-white "others". Roan, who works as a primary school teacher, proceeded to talk about his experiences working at a school with a lot of Syrian children:

> "I worked at a language school and a lot of refugees come there and they are from Syria and uhm, there you see that the women need to get up immediately if the men want something, and that's already the case with children. […] So I think that's worse in certain neighborhoods and cities, like that women need to stay at home and do laundry and men need to work and earn money."[7]

When talking about race/ethnicity in relation to masculinity, some pointed to specific ethnic minorities, such as Syrian, Antillean and Surinamese people, as exhibiting a specific, usually more traditional, "macho" type of masculinity. From the fact that some of them proceeded to talk about these "other" groups of people, instead of about their own race/ethnicity, it becomes clear that ethnicity was thus seen by many of them as something that does not refer to them personally, but only to those that are not white. This also became apparent when several interviewees argued that they did not consider it their place to speak of race/ethnicity in relation to masculinity, and that it would be better to ask people of color for their reflections. While it is certainly true that the perspectives of people of color are valuable here, white people are of course not

[6] Original: "Een vrouw zou eerder zeggen dat een man galant hoort te zijn, waar een man bijvoorbeeld zou zeggen over mannen dat ze geen emotie mogen tonen. Wat elkaar niet uitsluit ofzo, maar de focus ligt net ergens anders denk ik."

[7] "Toevallig werkte ik ook op een taalschool en daar komen heel veel vluchtelingen op en die komen dan uit Syrië en uhm daar zie je heel erg zegmaar dat de vrouwen die moeten eigenlijk gelijk opstaan als de mannen wat willen en dat is bij de kinderen al. (…) Dus ik denk zeker dat in bepaalde wijken en steden dat nog erger is, van vrouwen moeten thuiszitten en de was doen en mannen moeten dan werken en het geld verdienen."

without race/ethnicity. What can thus be seen here, is the invisibility of whiteness. The British-Australian scholar Sara Ahmed, in 'A Phenomenology of Whiteness', argues that whiteness is invisible to those who inhabit it (Ahmed, 2007). In this work, Ahmed conceptualizes whiteness as something that orientates bodies into particular directions. She argues that whiteness as an orientation "puts certain things within reach", and that spaces are orientated around whiteness (Ahmed, 2007, p.154). In my theoretical framework, I have briefly addressed the colonial history of the Netherlands, and its relationship to gender, arguing that the coloniality of masculinity carries on into the present. Drawing on the work of Frantz Fanon, Ahmed argues that "the world of whiteness" in which we live, in which whiteness is unmarked, is an inheritance of colonialism (Ahmed, 2007, p.153). According to her, whiteness is both inherited from the past, and reproduced in the present. That we live in a 'world of whiteness', in which it is largely invisible as a racial category, is reflected in the responses of interviewees, as whiteness is invisibilized to the extent that when asked to reflect on race or ethnicity in relation to masculinity, interviewees generally did not consider these terms to refer to themselves. For many of them, ethnicity is primarily something that racialized "others" have, whereas white people are assumed to be without ethnicity. In the introduction of her book *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race,* Gloria Wekker reflected on the invisibilized position of whiteness within Dutch society.

> "Whiteness is not acknowledged as a racialized/ethnicized positioning at all. Whiteness is generally seen as so ordinary, so lacking in characteristics, so normal, so devoid of meaning, that a project like this runs a real risk of being considered emptiness incarnate" (Wekker, 2016, p.2).

Interestingly, Wekker draws a comparison between whiteness and masculinity, as both are commonly treated as natural, invisible categories. Masculinity and whiteness are not only similar, because of their unmarked nature, but are also closely intertwined, as Dutch hegemonic masculinity is white. This is illustrated by the fact that a few of the participants of this research stated that the type of man that they recognize as a Dutch masculine ideal is usually white.

I would not argue that the white interviewees did not believe that their own race/ethnicity has an impact on how they relate to their own sense of masculinity or to dominant masculinities at all, as some of them reflected on it when prompted. Yet it is telling of the unmarked nature of whiteness that without being steered into the direction

of reflecting on whiteness, interviewees generally only spoke of specific groups of non-white "others". For Raj, a 29-year-old non-binary person who describes their ethnicity as half Hindu, the ways in which their ethnicity and masculinity relate to one another and are interconnected was more apparent:

> "I'm always asked where I'm from, or what my roots are, or something like that. So when people see me, they don't think 'You're the stereotypical Dutch man.' There's a different image. Also, if I look a bit more queer, I notice that I always get looks. When I wear nail polish, for example, and I'm on the bus and people see my nail polish, there's always looks like 'huh, you're wearing nail polish?' and I think that confusion is even bigger because I also have a beard and short hair and for many people, I look like a Muslim man. […] I think it [the confusion] is even bigger when I'm holding hands with my husband. I get even more looks."[8]

This illustrates a point that I have raised in the introduction of this thesis, namely that to understand gender, one must constantly go beyond gender, meaning that the ways in which someone experiences their gender cannot be understood without taking other aspects of their experience into account. Here, Raj illustrates that how they are perceived in terms of their masculinity, is not separate from how they are perceived in terms of their ethnicity and sexuality. Rather, the combination of each of those perceived characteristics shapes the assumptions that others have when looking at them. When people look at them wearing nail polish, for example, they are not merely confused because of their gender non-conformity, but particularly because of their gender non-conformity in relation to their perceived ethnicity or religious background *and* in relation to their perceived sexual orientation. In the context of most Western European states, Muslim masculinities are associated with Islamic fundamentalism, and are constructed as a threat to "Western" values such as LGBTQ+ inclusion and gender equalities by some (Hertz, 2018). This reflects a seemingly binary opposition of Western countries as modern and liberal, and non-Western (predominantly Muslim) societies as traditional and conservative. Although Raj is neither Muslim, nor a man,

[8] "Mij wordt altijd gevraagd waar kom je vandaan, of wat zijn je roots, of iets in die trant. Dus van mij wordt niet uitgegaan van "jij bent het stereotype Nederlandse man" zeg maar. Dus er is een ander beeld. En ik denk ook daar in, als ik er een beetje queerder uit zie zeg maar, ik merk wel dat er altijd wel blikken zijn. Als ik nagellak draag bijvoorbeeld en ik zit in een bus en mensen zien mijn nagellak, dan zijn er altijd wel blikken van huh jij hebt nagellak op en ik denk dat die verwarring nog groter is omdat ik ook een baard heb en kort haar en voor heel veel mensen zie ik er uit als een moslim man, dus ik denk dat dat ook moeilijk te rijmen is, en ik denk dat dat nog groter is als ik zeg maar met mijn man hand in hand loop, dan heb je nog meer die blikken."

the fact that they are often perceived as such, means that they are exposed to such dominant constructions of Muslim masculinities in the Netherlands. As a result, their gender expression may lead to confusion, as they do not merely deviate from what is Dutch hegemonic masculinity, but especially from normative constructions of non-Western, or Muslim masculinities.

## Changing Definitions of Masculinity

Which characteristics are seen as normatively masculine, and whether one is deemed to meet those characteristics, is not only dependent on one's socio-economic position, sexuality, or race/ethnicity, but is also subject to change over time. Several interviewees noticed changes in what is normatively masculine in Dutch society. For instance, they pointed out that there is increasingly more room for men to express themselves in a variety of ways. Justin, who is 32 years old and works as a technician in the field of medicine, expressed that according to him, it is becoming easier for men to find out who they are and what they like, without always having to conform to normative ideas of what is masculine and what is not.

> "I think the luxury of today is that we are allowed to make our own decisions a bit more, to explore what we think suits us as a man, but also our own personal interests and what we want to do with our life in the future and that it's a bit less dependent on the unwritten rules of what family expects of us."[9]

Similarly, Dirk described that some of the things that are still associate with masculinity, such as that it is not 'masculine' to express emotions, and that men should provide for their family financially, are increasingly being recognized as outdated. This sentiment was shared by Justin, Raj, and Bob. Another change, which was mentioned by both Raj and Dirk, is that it is also becoming more normalized for fathers to spend time with their children. Raj expressed this idea as follows:

> "I think that it's becoming more normal for men to be with their kids more, to care more. There's more space for that. Being a stay-at-home dad may still be taking it too far for a lot of people, but if you see children playing outside with their

[9] Original: "Ik denk dat de luxe van tegenwoordig is dat we ook wat meer voor ons zelf mogen kiezen, mogen uitzoeken wat we bij ons vinden passen als man, maar ook bij onze persoonlijke interesses, wat we mogen gaan doen met ons leven in de toekomst en dat het wat minder vastligt aan de ongeschreven regels wat familie van ons verwacht."

> dad, there's more space for that. So I think that in many ways, masculinity is being expanded, but slowly and not everywhere in the same way."[10]

Courtney Grey, who has researched the experiences of Dutch stay-at-home fathers through oral history interviews, came to a similar conclusion as Raj, namely that it is still very rare for a man to be the primary caretaker (Grey, 2015). Yet, she also argues that although the dominant family dynamic among cisgender heterosexual couples in the Netherlands continues to be that the woman fulfills the role of the homemaker, and the man the role of the breadwinner, this dynamic is increasingly followed less strictly (Grey, 2015). As Raj points out, such changes may be slow, but are nonetheless occurring. What is considered as properly masculine, and what is not, is thus constantly evolving.

## Personal Relationships to Masculinity

Thus far, I have discussed what first came to mind for the participants when I asked them to reflect on what masculinity is, according to them, and what is considered to be normatively masculine in the Netherlands. It is important to note that the interviewees did not develop an understanding of masculinity or relationship to masculinity that is completely separate from dominant masculinities and the characteristics that they associate with such masculinities. Rather, the way these transmasculine people relate to masculinity seemed to be inextricably linked to how masculinity is defined normatively. T.J. Jourian, who has interviewed transmasculine people from different areas in the United States, has shown that dominant and normative representations of masculinity (because of their omnipresence) were taken as an entry point for his informants, an entry point with which they negotiated when constructing their own relationship to masculinity (Jourian, 2017). Throughout my own interviews, it became clear that my respondents also construct their own relationship to masculinity in relation to normative masculinities. This relationship could be one of opposition or refusal, but is more commonly one that does not fully reject nor accept all aspects of normative constructions of masculinity. José Esteban Muñoz's concept of disidentification, which was first introduced in his work *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of*

[10] Original: Maar ik denk wel bijvoorbeeld ook dat mannen meer met hun kinderen bezig kunnen zijn, meer kunnen zorgen. Daar komt meer ruimte. Nog steeds niet, als je zegt van ik ben een thuisblijfpapa dat zal dan voor heel veel mensen weer een slag te ver zijn, maar als je kinderen met hun vader buiten ziet spelen zeg maar dan is daar wel ruimte voor. Dus ik denk dat er op heel veel plekken wel steeds meer ruimte komt, dat mannelijkheid opgerekt wordt, maar wel langzaam en niet overal gelijk.

*Politics* is useful in understanding the nuanced relationship to masculinity that many transmasculine people have, that is neither a complete refusal, nor a complete confirmation of normative masculinities (Muñoz, 1999). With disidentification, Muñoz refers to an act of resistance that is characterized by the creation of new truths. Muñoz characterizes it as a strategy that can be employed by minority subjects, such as people of color or queer and trans people.

> "Disidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies that the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship" (Muñoz, 1999, p.4).

Disidentification is a third mode of dealing with normative structures, which neither fully opposes nor adopts the dominant reality entirely. T.J. Jourian has worked with Muñoz' disidentification in relation to trans masculinities (2017). According to Jourian, "to disidentify is an agentic political act of resistance that creates new truths rather than either adopting the dominant reality or opposing it entirely." (Jourian, 2017, p.247). Applying this concept specifically to trans masculinities, disidentification disrupts the narrative that transmasculine people either align completely with normative masculinities, or oppose and/or subvert normative masculinities entirely in all aspects of their lives. This allows for a much more nuanced, ambiguous, perspective on the ways in which transmasculine relate to normative constructions of masculinity. This is a perspective that is very much reflected in the lived experiences of the informants of this research, as none of the interviewees are in active opposition to, or alignment with, all characteristics of normative masculinities at all given times. They do not reject masculinity altogether, nor do they embrace it fully. Some of the interviewees did express a desire to redefine masculinity, because they felt like how masculinity is normatively described and what it is associated with is quite limited, but that does not mean that they necessarily wanted to reject masculinity altogether. Bob, a student who is currently questioning whether he is a man or non-binary, expressed this sentiment in the following way:

> "I think that the idea of masculinity that society shows me is quite negative, and in myself, I look for a different kind of masculinity. One that does allow emotions, and that does not

> necessarily have to be physically strong and yeah… yeah, just a different definition."[11]

As Bob mentions here, and as I have detailed above, masculinity is commonly associated with a lack of being able to express emotions, a point which has long been addressed by numerous scholars (i.e. Seidler, 1989; Kimmel, 1994; hooks, 2004). This was something that came up in most of the interviews. For the interviewees who sought to redefine masculinity, allowing for the expression of emotions was one of the most important characteristics of their own redefined understanding of masculinity. Miriam Abelson, in her interviews with transgender men in the United States, found something similar (Abelson, 2019). Many of her informants, in similar fashion to mine, constructed their masculinities in opposition to hypermasculine masculinities that do not allow for the expression of emotions. Even the informants that opposed excessive displays of emotions recognized that emotional displays are in some cases desirable. By redefining what masculinity entails, a relationship to masculinity can be constructed that is experienced as more emotionally liberating, and what is considered to be normatively masculine may be changed from 'within'.[12]

The interviewees did not only describe their relationship to masculinity in relation to normative masculinities, but also in relation to femininity. Justin, a 32-year-old transmasculine person from the East of the Netherlands, explains that masculinity in and of itself is not necessarily very meaningful to him, but that he sees himself as masculine mostly because he does not think of himself as feminine. He elaborates as follows:

> "Well, it's actually mostly just that I don't identify as feminine. Yeah… It's difficult, because I've always had an aversion to anything that is feminine, both to feminine clothing and to the feminine physical characteristics with which I was born, so

[11] Original: "het idee van mannelijkheid die de maatschappij me een beetje laat zien vind ik vrij negatief eigenlijk en in mezelf zoek ik dan een ander soort mannelijkheid op. Eentje die gewoon wel emoties toestaat en niet per se sterk moet zijn fysiek en ja… ja gewoon een andere definitie eigenlijk."

[12] A different, yet somewhat similar, view on masculinity was described by Arthur. He expressed that because he himself strongly identifies on the masculine spectrum, everything that he does, likes, or wears, is by definition also masculine. Following this understanding of masculinity, it is no longer specific behaviors, traits, or expressions that are masculine. Rather, if the person engaging in those behaviors or expressions sees themselves as masculine, they automatically become masculine by extension.

> because of that I identify more with masculinity, because I don't identify with femininity at all."[13]

Justin was not the only one who expressed a sense of discomfort with the term femininity. Several other interviewees described that thinking of themselves as feminine evoked feelings of discomfort or dysphoria. However, the fact that thinking of themselves in relation to femininity evoked feelings of discomfort did not mean, for most of them, that they wanted to avoid any behavior or any way of expressing themselves that could be characterized as feminine by others. Rather, most of the interviewees did express that they possessed certain characteristics that normatively would be considered as feminine, such as showing vulnerability and affection, and being emphatic, and that they did not seek to eliminate these characteristics. The fact that transmasculine people often do not seek to eliminate all characteristics that are associated with femininity is echoed in other research (Abelson, 2019; Ross and Lafrance, 2014; Vegter; 2013). However, a discomfort with the term femininity is not as present in this other research. This may be related to the fact that just like 'masculinity' and 'masculine' are more closely connected to maleness, 'femininity' and 'feminine' may be more closely connected to femaleness in the Dutch language. Dirk explained that because of the discomfort he felt with the term femininity, he preferred to use the term 'queer' to refer to some of the characteristics that are commonly referred to as feminine. By calling these 'queer' instead, Dirk eliminated the feelings of discomfort that he associated with the term femininity, while also recognizing that these characteristics are not stereotypically masculine. For him, it was thus not all the stereotypically characteristics themselves that caused feelings of discomfort, but the designation of those characteristics as feminine. By using the term 'queer', he was able to avoid using a gendered term to describe certain characteristics that he possessed, while maintaining the association of these characteristics with gender-nonconformity.

Raj, and to a lesser extent Bob and Dirk, did not seek to redefine masculinity in a way that reflected who they are as a person. Rather, they expressed a desire to eliminate the association of certain characteristics with femininity and others with masculinity entirely. The ways in which some of the interviewees relate to masculinity counters the idea that one who

[13] Original: "Nou, het is eigenlijk voornamelijk dat ik mezelf niet identificeer als vrouwelijk. Ja.. het is heel lastig, want ik heb altijd gewoon een afkeer gehad aan alles wat vrouwelijke is, aan zowel vrouwelijke kleding als aan de vrouwelijke fysieke eigenschappen waar ik mee geboren was, dus dat maakt dat ik me meer identificeer met mannelijk, omdat ik me juist niet identificeer met vrouwelijk"

identifies as male or transmasculine in terms of their gender identity, must automatically also see themself as masculine. This does not mean that they did not recognize that certain expressions or behaviors are characterized as either feminine or masculine by others. What it does mean, however, is that they did not wish to think of those characteristics in gendered terms themselves. Taking the example of the expression of emotions, these interviewees did not want to redefine this trait as something that can be masculine, but wanted to think of it as a characteristic that is neither associated with femininity, nor with masculinity, but with being human more generally. Therefore, they generally did not prefer to refer to themselves using gendered terms such as masculine or feminine. Even if they did not prefer to use such language, Raj expressed that they did use such gendered terms in particular situations. They explained that these can be useful words to explain how they relate to gender to someone who is not yet familiar with what being trans or non-binary can mean.

> "If someone doesn't know much about gender and I need to describe that I'm non-binary, I do use terms like masculine and feminine to clarify that I have both masculine and feminine characteristics. But if I could use my own language, I'd prefer to skip it entirely."[14]

How a person describes their relationship to masculinity and femininity is thus situational, and can be dependent on one's conversation partner. Although Raj uses these terms at times to explain their non-binary identity to others, for them, gendered terms such as masculine or feminine evoked feelings of rebellion. Raj points to the fact that whether something is considered masculine or feminine is in fact arbitrary. Because masculinity and femininity are such personal things, they oppose the categorization of specific characteristics as either feminine or masculine.

> "First of all, I think that the words masculinity and femininity are very individual words. What it means to me, is not what it means to you. […] My relationship to the world masculinity is that it makes me a bit rebellious. What is considered masculine

[14] Original: "Als mensen zegmaar niet zo veel weten van gender en ik moet beschrijven dat ik non-binair ben, dan gebruik ik wel vaak begrippen als mannelijk en vrouwelijk om te verduidelijken van ik heb zowel mannelijke als vrouwelijke eigenschappen. Maar als ik mijn hele eigen taal zou mogen gebruiken zou ik het liever helemaal skippen."

> by some, is that actually masculine? We've just decided that it is at some point, but the question is if that is real."[15]

Raj also pointed to the fact that masculinity is a very fluid concept. They explained that whether they perceive something as feminine or masculine is dependent on the specific situation that they are in, and can change over time.

> "I think that my beard is very masculine, but sometimes I see a woman with a beard or a drag queen with a beard and think it is very feminine, so what can be very masculine at one point can be very feminine in another situation. So, I think it's a very fluid concept."[16]

Thus, taking the beard as an example, Raj would not characterize a beard as something that is inherently masculine. Rather, it is something that can be masculine or feminine depending on the situation and the person who has the beard. This reflects a widely accepted idea in masculinities research, namely that what is seen as masculine is always context-dependent (i.e. Connell, 1995). Yet, whether a certain characteristic is perceived as masculine does not only vary between different cultures and historical contexts. Rather, as illustrated by the example that Raj gives, it can also be a very personal thing. According to them, it is not the beard itself that is inherently masculine or feminine. Rather, whether they perceive the beard as something masculine, feminine, or neither of these categories is dependent on the person who has the beard, and the situation in which the beard appears. Follow Raj's line of thinking, masculinity and femininity thus become very fluid concepts.

Furthermore, the experiences of the interviewees illustrate that the way people relate to masculinity is also shaped by the environment in which they grew up. Arthur illustrates this by talking about his own upbringing. Because he was relatively socially isolated during his youth, he spent a lot more time around his parents than most of his peers did. He explains that both of his parents were relatively gender non-conforming. For Arthur, this meant that he

[15] Original: "Ik vind ten eerste dat het woord mannelijkheid zoals het woord vrouwelijkheid dat dat hele individuele woorden zijn. Als in, wat het voor mij betekent is niet wat het voor jou betekent. […] En mijn relatie tot dat woord mannelijk is vaak dat ik een beetje rebels er van wordt, dat ik zoiets heb van ja wat voor de een mannelijk is, is dat wel mannelijk? Dat hebben we gewoon afgesproken met elkaar op een gegeven moment, maar de vraag is natuurlijk of dat wel echt is."

[16] Original: "ik vind mijn baard heel mannelijk, maar ik zie ook wel eens een baard bij een vrouw of bij een drag queen en dan vind ik het weer heel vrouwelijk, dus wat zegmaar het ene moment iets heel mannelijks is kan het andere moment weer heel vrouwelijk zijn. Dus het is een beetje een fluïde begrip."

grew up with an understanding of masculinity and femininity that was different from what he later recognized as normative in society more broadly. To illustrate this point, Arthur gave a couple of examples, including this one:

> "My dad doesn't like coffee and only drinks tea and stuff like ginger ale. […] So I associate drinking tea with masculinity and coffee with femininity, and it took me a very long time to discover that in society, it's the opposite [laughter]. Coffee is something for tough guys and tea is a bit soft and feminine and for hippies while in my mind, it's the complete opposite."[17]

Although this is a seemingly insignificant example, it does illustrate the following two points: the impact of one's own environment on what one considers to be masculine, but also the arbitrariness of what is considered to be masculine and what is considered to be feminine, which Raj also pointed out.

## Conclusions

In this chapter, I have addressed what transmasculine people associate with masculinity, and how they personally relate to this term. There were many commonalties in the characteristics that the informants associated with Dutch hegemonic masculinity. Such characteristics included an inability to express emotions, being in control, and being thin, white, and muscular. From the responses of my interviewees, it has become clear that the ways in which transmasculine people relate to masculinity themselves and construct their masculinities discursively are not completely separate from what masculinity is associated with normatively. Rather, transmasculine people construct their masculinities in relation to hegemonic masculinity. This relationship could be one of opposition or refusal, but is more commonly one of disidentification. Most of the informants did not want to eliminate a relationship to masculinity altogether, but did seek to redefine what masculinity meant to them personally. Each of them found that were certain aspects of what masculinity is associated with normatively that they personally wanted to deviate from. However, in this chapter I have also shown that not all transmasculine people necessarily have a strong relationship to masculinity. Here, I deviate from much of the existing research, which is

[17] Original: "Mijn vader lust geen koffie en drinkt alleen maar thee en dingen als ginger ale. Dus ik associeer thee drinken met mannelijkheid en koffie met vrouwelijk en het heeft heel lang geduurd voordat ik door had dat de maatschappij het dus precies andersom ziet [gelach]. Koffie is echt iets voor stoere mannen en thee is een beetje soft en geitenwollen sokken en vrouwelijk, terwijl in mijn hoofd is het echt volledig andersom."

premised on the idea that transmasculine people must always have a strong relationship to masculinity. Yet, that one possesses certain characteristics that are associated with masculinity, does not necessarily mean that one wants to use such gendered terms to describe oneself. Several of my informants expressed that they preferred to think of certain characteristics in less gendered terms. They oppose the categorization of certain characteristics as masculine, and others as feminine, and preferred to think these as characteristics that can be embodied by anyone, regardless of their gender identity. Thus far, I have discussed masculinity on the level of the discursive. In the following chapter, I will examine in more detail how transmasculine people navigate norms surrounding masculinity in their daily lives, focusing more on the embodied aspects of masculinity.

## Chapter 2: Trans Embodiments of Masculinity: Conformity, Subversion and Disidentification

In the previous chapter, I have addressed the ways in which transmasculine people define and construct masculinity discursively, arguing that transmasculine people relate to masculinity in diverse ways, and construct their relationship masculinity in relation or in opposition to normative conceptions of masculinity, as well as femininity. In this chapter, I move to a discussion of the ways in which they perform and embody masculinity in their everyday lives, and navigate normative expectations of masculinity while doing so. As I have mentioned in the introduction, trans masculinities have oftentimes been positioned as either inherently subversive of normative masculinities, or as a confirmation and reinforcement of such normative masculinities. I would, however, suggest that the relationship between trans embodiments of masculinity and (hetero)normative masculinities is somewhat more complicated than that. In this chapter, I therefore show that the transmasculine people that I have interviewees cannot be divided into those who embody masculinity in a normative way, and those who embody masculinity in a subversive way. Rather, each of them embodies masculinity (or refuses to embody masculinity) in a more complex way, in which elements of both subversion and conformity may be present. I start off this chapter with a discussion of some of the ways in which transmasculine people may adapt their gender presentation in order to approximate normative masculinities. Then, I move to a discussion of some of subversive characteristics of the ways in which transmasculine people embody masculinity. As I did in the previous chapter, I here also return to José Esteban Muñoz's concept of disidentification to describe a way in which transmasculine people navigate masculinities that is neither characterized by full subversion, nor by full conformity to normative masculinities.

### Normative Masculinities and the Pressure to Conform

Although not all of my informants identified as male, all of them are read as such in everyday interactions with strangers. As a result of being perceived as male, they are exposed to normative ideas of how to perform or embody masculinity. Informants had different ways of dealing with normative ideas surrounding masculinity, and interactions in which they are read as male. One of the ways of dealing with normative expectations could be to adapt one's expression to approximate those expectations. During each of the interviews, I asked the person I was interviewing if they had ever consciously adapted their gender expression and behavior in order to fit what is seen as normatively masculine. When responding to this question, all of the participants referred back to the period of time when they had just come

out as trans or when they had just started their transition. From their responses, it became clear that the extent to which interviewees adapted their gender expression or behavior to meet the expectations of others, or to approximate normative masculinities, was subject to change over time. Each of the informants mentioned that during the beginning of their transition, they felt pressure to behave and present themselves in what can be considered a stereotypically masculine manner. Justin, Raj and Arthur all used the term 'overcompensation' to refer to the ways in which they adapted their behavior and expression in the early stages of their transition. Justin, who is a 32-year old trans man , said the following about this:

> "In the moment that you have figured it out for yourself and know what you want, but you're not allowed to start hormones yet, that's a moment that it is very unpleasant if you are misgendered, and because of that insecurity I was overcompensating. So dressing much more tough and always wearing a cap, things like that. So yeah, that was worse in the beginning… and very conscious of anything that looks feminine in terms of movements or whatever, making sure that you don't show that."[18]

As can be seen in this quote, Justin mainly avoided anything that is associated with femininity because he wanted to avoid being misgendered. This corresponds to what Jamison Green found when he interviewed trans men, namely that tit was not being perceived as insufficiently masculine that they were concerned about, but being perceived as female (Green, 2005). Both Jamison's and my own informants noticed that if they presented themselves in a more stereotypically masculine manner, they were more likely to be read as male. If a cisgender man presents himself in a more stereotypically feminine manner, the result would most likely be that he would be perceived as gay. If a transmasculine person does the same thing, they would be more likely to be perceived as female instead. Because most of the interviewees wanted to avoid this at all costs, they consciously adapted their behaviors and expressions in order to decrease their chances of being read as female, for

[18] Original: "Op het moment dat je toch heel erg voor jezelf al hebt uitgezocht en weet wat je wil maar nog niet aan de hormonen mag, dat is een moment dat het heel erg vervelend is als je gemisgenderd wordt en die onzekerheid zorgt er dus wel voor dat ik een beetje aan het overcompenseren was. Dus juist veel stoerder gekleed en altijd een petje op, dat soort dingen. Dus dat ja, in het begin was dat wel wat erger… en heel erg bewust van iets wat vrouwelijk mag ogen qua bewegingen of wat dan ook en zorgen dat je dat niet laat zien."

instance by lowering their tone of voice, dressing in a stereotypically masculine manner, and acting more 'tough'. This phenomenon is also recognized by other scholars. Abelson, for instance, also recognizes that some trans men incorporate normative masculine practices as a strategy to avoid being gendered as female, and ensure their recognition as male (Abelson, 2019). Bob was one of the interviewees who described having incorporated such normative masculine practices.

> "If I dressed right, people would more quickly think "oh that's a boy", but my voice was immediately… well, then no one would doubt it anymore and everyone would immediately think "oh that's a lady", but since my voice started dropping, I no longer have the feeling like, oh I need to dress like this, I need to behave like this, I need to walk like this."[19]

For Bob, the pressure to express himself in a certain way in order to be perceived as male has thus largely disappeared now that he is consistently read as male. From this example, it becomes clear that for him, this pressure was indeed not as much tied to a desire to be perceived as normatively masculine, but to being perceived as male. For all interviewees it was more desirable to be read as male by strangers, than to be read as female. This was also the case for the interviewees who did not identify as male. Although neither being seen as female nor being seen as male corresponded to their identity, being seen as female caused them more dysphoria than being seen as male did.

Transition, and especially the effects of hormone replacement therapy, had an impact on how the interviewees embodied masculinity. As they were increasingly being read as male, Roan, Lucas, Ivo and Bob all expressed that they were able to construct their masculinities much more freely. As their chances of being read and addressed as female decreased, masculinity became less constraining to them, as expressing themselves in a stereotypically masculine manner became something that they *could* do if they so desired, instead of something they *must* do to protect their own mental health and physical safety. The period of overcompensation that each of the informants referred to was therefore a temporary

[19] Original: "Als ik me goed kleedde, dan hadden mensen veel sneller van "oh dat is een jongen'", maar mijn stem was toen gelijk… nou dan had niemand meer een twijfel en dan dacht iedereen gelijk "oh dat is een mevrouw", maar sinds dat mijn stem ook echt is gaan zakken heb ik niet meer zo het gevoel van oh ik moet me zo kleden, ik moet me zo gedragen, ik moet zo lopen."

one. Lucas was one of the informants who described how his relationship and embodiment of masculinity changed throughout his transition. As stated by him,

> "I think that at this point, I see masculinity as socially desirable behavior that is imposed. […] Earlier on, I saw it more as a kind of goal for myself, that I needed to fit within that framework, because otherwise people would not understand me. Something like that. Now I feel like I can let it go a bit more."[20]

As Lucas describes in this quote, he now no longer sees masculinity as a goal that he needs to meet in order to be understood and respected by his family and peers. He is now able to deviate from what is expected of him in terms of masculinity. The fact that Lucas and many of the other interviewees felt much less constrained by masculinity was aided by the fact that they no longer experienced as much dysphoria as they did before starting their transition. With this lessening of dysphoria thus came a newfound freedom in gender expression for many of them. As a result of an increase in confidence and a decrease in their chances of being read as female, many interviewees started to think of themselves and their expression in less gendered terms. Vanessa Vegter, who conducted a qualitative study of the relationship that Canadian transgender men have to masculinity, found something similar: "as participants began to self-actualize, a tendency to embrace human characteristics (rather than gendered characteristics) became evident" (Vegter, 2013, p.101). Transition, and being read as male, thus allowed her informants to relate to their personal characteristics in less gendered ways.

In addition to the physical impact of transition, Ivo, a 22-year-old transgender man who lives in a small town in the South of the Netherlands, mentioned that one of the social impacts of transition that eased the pressure to embody masculinity in a particular way was that his interactions with men started to change and became more prevalent, as he was increasingly read as male. For him, this impacted how he relates to masculinity. He described that as he started interacting with other men more, he came to realize that all of those men deviate from what he first associated with masculinity, at least to some extent. He summarizes this as follows:

[20] Original: "Ik denk wel dat op dit punt ik mannelijkheid meer zie als een soort sociaal gewenst gedrag dat een beetje wordt opgelegd. Eerst zag ik het meer gewoon als een soort streven voor mezelf, van oh ik moet wel een beetje binnen dat kader passen, anders zullen mensen me niet begrijpen. Een beetje op die manier. Nu heb ik het gevoel alsof ik het wat meer kan loslaten."

> "As I began to have more contact with male people in my own environment, such as my uncles and colleagues, I began to notice that they were in fact not the tough guys that I had always thought they were. I always had the idea that men are always tough, that they never express their emotions and that they only have masculine hobbies."[21]

Through interactions with other men, Ivo thus discovered that most men deviate from normative ideas about masculinity. This corresponds to Connell's argument about hegemonic masculinity, namely that it is not representative of what most men or masculine people are like, but that it refers to a normative ideal of what a masculine embodiment should look like in a particular time and place. In reality, barely anyone is able to fully meet this ideal (Connell, 1995).

While the physical changes that came with transition caused many of the interviewees to develop a relationship to masculinity that was more free, and less "forced", these physical changes also allowed many of them to perceive their body as more masculine. Certain physical changes became 'markers of masculinity' for them (Aboim and Vasconcelos, 2021. 12). Dirk illustrates this by talking about the hair growth that was caused by testosterone:

> "There are some things during my medical transition and mostly the influence of hormones, that made me think 'Oh yes, this is really masculine!'. You know, getting chest hair for example. I was insanely happy when I got chest hair, I was so happy when my stomach hair started to touch my chest hair. Stuff like that, that you never expected to have any meaning."[22]

As can be seen in this quote, hair growth was experienced as a marker of masculinity by Dirk. This means that as a result of his hair growth, he felt more masculine. While most of the interviewees felt constrained by many of the characteristics that are associated with

[21] Original: "Naarmate ik eigenlijk werkte dat ik wat meer omgang had met mannelijke personen in mijn omgeving, zoals mijn ooms en collega's, merkte ik eigenlijk dat dat ook allemaal niet zulke heel stoere kerels waren als ik eigenlijk dacht, want ik had voor mezelf heel echt het gevoel van mannen zijn gewoon altijd stoer en die vertonen hun emoties niet zo en die hebben alleen maar van die masculine hobby's."

[22] Original: "Er zijn wel dingen waarvan ik in mijn medische transitie en vooral de invloed van de hormonen zoiets had van 'oh yes dit is echt heel mannelijk'. Weet je wel, borsthaar krijgen bijvoorbeeld. Ik ben idioot blij geweest toen mijn borsthaar kwam, ik ben zo blij geweest toen mijn buikhaar mijn borsthaar begon aan te raken, van die dingen waar je nooit over nadenkt dat dat enige betekenis zou hebben."

masculinity, certain bodily characteristics that are associated with masculinity resulted in feelings of gender euphoria for many of them.

## Continued Pressures to Conform

Even though for many of them it was no longer as present as it was during the beginning of their transition, some of the interviewees did still occasionally experience pressure to conform to normative masculinities. Roan, for instance, is an active member of a hockey club. Before his transition, he played on a women's team. When he came out as a trans man, he decided to temporarily quit hockey. Recently, he had decided to return to his former hockey club and is now playing in a men's team. One of the things he is now struggling with the most in terms of hypermasculine behaviors, is dealing with how his male teammates talk about women. Roan expressed that such conversations make him feel very uncomfortable. Yet, he expressed that he does not feel comfortable enough around his teammates to have a discussion with them about their behavior, and to explain why the things that they are saying can be harmful.

> "For example, if I'm playing hockey and we are sitting in the locker room and everyone is talking tough I sometimes catch myself going along with it even though I think what they're saying is unpleasant, but because I don't want to be the only one to say like 'you don't talk like that about women or your mom' or whatever, then because you are the only one – and I don't actually know, maybe there are more who think 'I'll just go along with it' – I do it. That's bad, but I do it."[23]

Roan went on to describe that he experiences this as an internal battle. On the one hand, he fears that going against what seems to be the norm in his sports team, would cause his teammates to no longer be as accepting of his presence. He expressed that it comes with a cost, namely the risk of being ostracized or the risk of being seen as not properly male. When I asked him if he was afraid of not being accepted as male by his teammates, he said the following:

[23] Original: "Als ik bijvoorbeeld ga hockeyen ook en dan zitten we in die kleedkamer en iedereen is dan stoer aan het praten en soms betrap ik mezelf erop dat in dan mee ga doen, terwijl ik het eigenlijk vervelend vind wat ze dan zeggen, maar omdat ik dan niet als enige wil zeggen van zo praat je toch niet over vrouwen of over je moeder of over weet ik veel wat, dan ga je toch omdat je dan de enige bent - en dat weet ik eigenlijk niet, misschien zijn er wel meer die dan gewoon denken "ik praat wel mee"- maar dat doe ik wel. Dat is wel erg, maar dat doe ik wel."

> "Yes, maybe. Or that they'll say things like "oh yes, you can see that you used to be…", that you get comments like that. Or like I said about being gay. It just affects your masculinity a bit, because you don't do things like they do."[24]

On the other hand, he recognizes that the ways in which other men talk about women are harmful, and that going along with that makes him very uncomfortable. Therefore, in situations like the one he describes, he has to make the trade-off between feeling comfortable and being recognized as properly masculine and/or male by others. The pressure to conform to specific aspects of normative masculinities when interacting with male peers that Roan describes has been touched upon by numerous scholars within masculinity studies, including Jackson Katz (i.e. Katz, 2006; Seabrook et al., 2016; Connell, 2005). Katz is an American scholar and activist who has worked on issues of gender, race, and violence, and particularly on gender-based violence prevention. In his book "The Macho Paradox" Katz touches upon the dynamics of particular male peer cultures (Katz, 2006). According to Katz, men sometimes feel forced to participate in sexist practices in order to maintain their standing in their group, as the sexual objectification of women is in many male peer groups among the criteria by which peers judge each other (Katz, 2006). Going against what is normatively masculine can lead to being seen as insufficiently masculine, which is commonly associated with homosexuality. This is exemplified by Roan's fear of being seen as gay by his peers if he were to express his discomfort with their behavior. Although the pressure to conform to dominant masculinities that Roan experiences is common among all groups of men or people who are read as male, part of his experience is specifically trans. In addition to the fear of being seen as insufficiently masculine, he also fears being seen as insufficiently male or as "different" from his cisgender peers. Notably, the fear of being seen as insufficiently male is not this present in each of the interactions that Roan has with other (cisgender) men. Roan described that the extent to which he feels comfortable enough to say something about the behaviors of other men is dependent on the situation he is in. He expressed that when he is talking to people that are close to him, like his close friends and family, he is more likely to call them out

[24] Original: "Ja, misschien wel. Of dat ze dan dingen gaan zeggen van "oh ja je kan wel zien dat je vroeger…", dat je zulke opmerkingen krijgt. Of wat ik zei over homo zijn. Inderdaad gewoon het tast dan een beetje je mannelijkheid aan, want je doet niet zoals zij doen."

on their behavior. When I asked him why it is easier to do this in those instances than it is with his teammates, he stated:

> "Because they already know me. They know what I'm like and I don't have the feeling that I need to prove that or something. It's also just a bit different in the sport's world, I think. There, men really have to be men and women really have to be women and there is nothing in between."[25]

Because of the prevailing binary thinking within the sports world, his own sports club is not a space in which he feels safe enough to subvert gender normativity. In "Gender Work: Survival, Subversion, and Subjectivity for Queer and Trans Youth", Josie Wenig uses the term gender work to describe the usage of normative gender presentation, as is done by Roan, as a survival strategy that may be employed by queer and trans youth to navigate hostile spaces.

> "In some ways gender work uses dominant ideology, normative gender presentation, to achieve survival in spaces where nonconformity (queerness and transgender) is severely punished. At the same time, using normative gender presentation is working against dominant ideology in that it allows for the thriving of queer and trans youth." (Wenig, 2015, p.86).

Here, Wenig speaks specifically about gender work in relation to queer and trans youth. Yet, I argue that her argument is more widely applicable to the ways in which trans people negotiate their gender presentation in spaces in which there is little room for gender nonconformity. One could argue that by conforming to a normative gender presentation, trans people reproduce and contribute to the maintenance of such normative ideas. Still, as Wenig argues, using gender conformity as a means to survival in a hostile space can have a subversive quality to it, as it can allow trans people to thrive in environments in which nonconformity is punished. To exemplify this, I want to briefly return to the Roan's experiences with locker-room talk among his teammates at his sports club. On the one hand,

[25] Original: "Omdat ze toch mij al kennen. Ze weten gewoon hoe ik ben en ik heb dan niet echt het idee dat ik dat nog moet bewijzen ofzo. In die sportwereld is het sowieso allemaal wat anders vind ik. Daar moeten echt mannen echt mannen zijn en vrouwen echt vrouwen zijn en daar zit dan niks tussen."

this can be taken as an example of the ways in which transmasculine people contribute to the maintenance of gender normativity. On the other hand, the mere presence of Roan as a trans man in a normative cisgender male-dominated space perhaps already contributes to the subversion of normative ideas about gender. Thus, a conformation to a gender normative presentation or embodiment does not necessarily have to foreclose the subversion of normative standards.

## Trans Masculinities and (un)Safety

The fact that going against cultural norms regarding masculinity can come at a cost was echoed by some of the other interviewees, including Dirk. The cost that Roan described was being ostracized or invalidated by his peers. Dirk described a different cost, namely the risk of physical violence. Dirk expressed that he sometimes adapts his behavior in order to feel safer, particularly in situations in which he encounters traditionally masculine presenting men that are strangers to him, for instance when he is walking home at night on his own.

> "There are situations in which I experience that feeling of unsafety. I then notice that I make myself look bigger and that my entire attitude changes. I become a bit more macho actually."[26]

In such situations, Dirk thus adapts the way in which he carries his body in order to mitigate the threat that the people he encounters may pose. The ways in which transgender men experience (un)safety is touched upon by the sociologist Miriam Abelson's in her work "Dangerous Privilege: Trans Men, Masculinities, and Changing Perceptions of Safety" (2014). For this study, Abelson interviewed 19 transgender men in the San Francisco Bay Area, in order to gain an insight into the construction of their masculinities in relation to violence and (un)safety. One of the things that Abelson found was that for the people she had interviewed, transphobic violence was actually not the source of most of their fears, as most of them were consistently read as male and assumed to be cisgender. Similarly, the people that I have interviewed were all read as male by strangers. As a result, they did not have to adapt their behavior in interactions with strangers in order to avoid being seen as female. Dirk, for instance, did not adapt his behavior because he feared being seen as female, but as queer or insufficiently masculine. This contrasts with the situations that I have discussed

[26] Original: "Er zijn wel situaties waarin ik bijvoorbeeld dat gevoel van onveiligheid een beetje ervaar en dan merk ik dat ik mezelf groter maak en ja dat mijn hele air zeg maar veranderd, een beetje de macho kant wel op ga eigenlijk"

previously, in which the fear of not being seen as male, rather than not being seen as properly masculine, led informants like Roan to adapt their behavior. When it comes to interactions with strangers that are not aware of their transness, the fear of not being seen as properly masculine predominated.

In "Dangerous Privilege", Abelson also argues that in response to the threat of violence of dominant masculinities, transgender men may develop defensive masculinities, which she defines as "a pattern of practice through which these men avoid a perceived threat of violence or make an effort to preserve their masculine sense of self when it is threatened" (Abelson, 2014, p.562). She contrasts this pattern of practice with a different one, namely that of transformative masculinities, which she defines as "a pattern of practice where interviewees attempted to challenge the gender order through egalitarian practices and enforcing transformative gender expectations on others" (Abelson, 2014, p.562). Whether someone practices defensive masculinities, transformative masculinities, a hybrid of the two, or a different pattern of practice altogether is dependent on the context in which they are situated. Abelson argues that the extent to which one feels safe can have an impact on the pattern of practices in which one engages. This can also be seen in the examples I have mentioned above. Roan, for instance, was able to embody a more transformative masculinity in situations in which he perceived himself to be relatively safe, whereas he resorted to what Abelson might classify as a more defensive masculinity in situations in which embodying a transformative masculinity might have negative consequences.

The situational nature of the performance of masculinities also came up in the interview with Lucas. When asked to exemplify the ways in which he has adapted his behavior in order to approximate normative masculinities, Lucas reflected on the way in which he performed masculinity at one of his previous jobs.

> "I've work in a cocktail bar for quite a long time and mostly kind of 'ideal' men came there, ideal Dutch men, and I sometimes had the feeling as if I had to be a lot more masculine, especially if people start drinking. […] So I think that those were moments that I was like, okay, it's actually like

> I'm performing in a play, you know, because yeah, I felt like otherwise I wouldn't be taken seriously."[27]

Because he wanted to be taken seriously by the people he encountered, Lucas thus adapted his behavior to meet the type of masculinity that is normative among the customers that he encountered. According to Lucas, the kind of masculinity that the customers of that cocktail bar embodied resembles an idealized type of Dutch masculinity, characterized by a traditionally masculine gender expression and behaviors. The fact that Lucas adapted his behavior to approximate this type of masculinity exemplifies the situational nature of masculinities.

Although each of the interviewees recognized ways in which they had adapted, or continue to adapt, their gender expression or behavior in order to approximate normative masculinities, most of them experienced little pressure from the people in their direct social circle to express themselves in a certain way. Or, when they did experience such pressure, most of them were able to put aside any expectations or negative comments that they got on their gender expression, and did not regularly adapt their expression or behavior to meet expectations that others may have of them. Dirk illustrated this by describing the comments that he got when he was bringing a shoulder bag to work.

> "For a long time, I had been wearing a kind of shoulder bag. Because of that, my colleagues always said things like 'oh there he is, mister Dirk with his purse.' At a certain point, that bag was no longer practical for me, but I kept using it simply because I wanted to show that I did not give a shit about their comments."[28]

[27] Original: "Ik heb best wel lang in een cocktailbar gewerkt en daar kwamen voornamelijk echt een beetje 'ideaal' mannen, ideaal Nederlandse mannen en ik had wel soms het gevoel alsof ik daar wel echt een stuk mannelijker moest zijn, al helemaal als mensen gaan drinken. […] Dus ik denk dat dat wel momenten waren dat ik wel echt zo was van oké ik doe nu eigenlijk een groot toneelstuk om maar gewoon… weet je, omdat ja, anders had ik het gevoel dat ik gewoon niet serieus genomen zou worden."

[28] Original: "Ik heb heel lang een soort schoudertas gedragen. Dan werd gezegd door collega's '"ja hoor, meneer merel met zijn handtas" en op een gegeven moment was dat ding totaal niet meer praktisch voor me, maar ik moest en ik zou dat ding bij me houden omdat ik moest laten zien dat ik er schijt aan had zeg maar."

In this instance, Dirk consciously decided to keep using his shoulder bag to not give in to the comments of his co-workers. Thus, instead of adapting his expression as a result of the (jokey) comments of his co-workers, he did the opposite.

## Subversive Masculinities and Disidentification

Thus far, I have discussed some of the ways in which transmasculine people may conform to normative masculinities, as well as their reasons for doing so. I now want to shift my focus to a discussion of the ways in which transmasculine people subvert normative masculinities. Within the existing scholarship on trans masculinities, there are different perspectives on the extent to which trans masculinities can be characterized as subversive. In his PH.D. dissertation "Becoming "The Man I Want to Be": Transgender Masculinity, Embodiment, and Sexuality", Morgan Seamont, for instance, argues that transgender men that have been socialized as girls are able to develop masculinities that do not meet hegemonic heteronormative norms (Seamont, 2018). Seamont argues that "trans masculinities diverge from, and frequently reject, hegemonic and heteronormative masculinities, while simultaneously creating a masculinity based on queer and feminist values" (Seamont, 2018, p.47). According to him, trans masculinities are inherently a refusal of hegemonic and heteronormative masculinity. Joe MacDonald, in his dissertation on ethical (trans) masculinities in New Zealand, refers to such subversions of normative masculinity as incoherent masculinities, which he defines as "masculinities that refuse to be constructed through the practices of racism, sexism, queerphobia and transphobia" (MacDonald, 2011, p.102). According to MacDonald, this politics of incoherence is not inherent to identifying as queer or transmasculine. Rather, incoherent masculinities actively challenge existing gender hierarchies. Here, MacDonald's argument is reminiscent of the work of Jack Halberstam:

> "I suggest we think carefully, butches and FTMs alike, about the kinds of men or masculine beings that we wish to become and lay claim to: alternative masculinities, ultimately, will fail to change existing gender hierarchies to the extent to which they fail to be feminist, antiracist, and queer" (Halberstam, 1998, p.173).

MacDonald and Halberstam thus arrive at a different conclusion than Seamont, and both argue that trans masculinities are not inherently a refusal of (hetero)normative masculinities. I, too, argue that trans masculinities are not inherently a refusal of normative masculinities,

nor inherently a confirmation of normative masculinities. Rather, transmasculine people embody masculinity in diverse ways that can hold elements of both conformity and refusal.

While trans masculinities may not be *inherently* subversive, transmasculine people can embody masculinity in subversive ways, or subvert normative expectations by refusing to embody masculinity. All of the informants of my research recognized multiple ways in which they challenge or subvert normative masculinities. Occasionally, such non-conforming behaviors or expressions are the result of a conscious decision to challenge existing norms. More often, my interviewees expressed that when they behaved or expressed themselves in a non-normative way, this was not the case because it was a conscious decision to do so, but more because those ways of expressing themselves simply felt most comfortable or natural to them. When I asked him if there are ways in which he challenges normative understandings of masculinity, Dirk gave a few different examples.

> "For example, having long nails. Uhm. Despite not being able to cry, never being afraid to show emotions. Or affection. Being vulnerable in conversations anyway. Those are not things that I consciously do to put myself outside of that [normative ideas], but those are things that very much fall outside of the stereotypical idea of masculinity."[29]

Here, Dirk illustrates some of the ways in which he subverts normative masculinities. Yet, Dirk's relationship to masculinity is not merely one complete opposition or refusal. Here, I want to return to Muñoz's concept of disidentification, which I have touched upon in the previous chapter, in relation to discursive constructions of masculinity. Applying this concept to the focus of this chapter, which lies with the embodiment of masculinity, disidentifying with masculinity means to embody masculinity, but to change and redefine the normative structures of masculinity from within. Ivo, for instance, identifies with masculinity to a large extent; yet, in multiple instances throughout the interview, he brought up his annoyance with men who talk about women in degrading ways.

> "Something that bothers me every now and then is just the look that men have towards women or the way in which men treat

[29] Original: "Bijvoorbeeld het hebben van lange nagels. Uh. Ondanks dat het huilen niet lukt nooit bang zijn om emoties te tonen. Of genegenheid. Me überhaupt zeg maar in conversaties kwetsbaar op te stellen. Dat zijn niet dingen die ik bewust doe om me daar naast te zetten, maar dat zijn wel dingen die heel erg buiten het stereotiepe idee van mannelijkheid vallen."

> women, with that catcalling and the very much looking at women as if they, how should I say this, as kind of a sexual object. I think that's very unpleasant, because personally I don't understand who men have such a strong desire and look at women like that. I think that's very harmful and yeah, that's just a piece of masculinity that I do not agree with and that I actually don't really understand why that still happens in this society, you know."[30]

In this quote, we can see that the ways in which men commonly treat women is an aspect of masculinity that Ivo clearly does not identify with and that he wants to do differently. He embodies masculinity, but for him, this does not mean going along with each of the characteristics of dominant masculinities. As is the case with Ivo, the characteristics that interviewees disidentified with were for the most part the behavioral characteristics of dominant masculinities, such as not expressing emotions, or actively engaging in 'locker-room talk' about women. All of the informants expressed that they deviated from these characteristics, at least to some extent, whether this be the result of a conscious decision or an unconscious process.

Thus far, I have discussed some of the situations in which informants conformed to normative masculinities in order to avoid negative consequences. Of course, situations in which embodying masculinity in a non-normative way or not embodying masculinity can come at a cost are not the only situations in which transmasculine people may conform to normative masculinities. For some of the informants, a stereotypically masculine embodiment or gender expression is simply what they feel most comfortable with. In terms of gender expression, Ivo, Lucas, Justin, Arthur, and Roan felt comfortable conforming to a gender expression that is seen as stereotypically masculine to a large extent. Justin, for instance, described having experimented with nail polish when he noticed that he was increasingly recognized as

[30] Original: "Waar ik me ook nog wel heel erg af en toe aan stoor is gewoon die kijk die mannen hebben naar vrouwen of de manier waarop mannen omgaan met vrouwen met dat nafluiten op straat en dat heel erg zo naar die vrouwen kijken alsof ze echt dat, hoe moet ik het zeggen, als een soort seksueel object zeg maar. Dat vind ik zelf ook nog wel heel vervelend, want ik zelf persoonlijk begrijp niet zo goed waarom mannen zo sterk die drang hebben en zo op die manier naar vrouwen te kijken zeg maar. Ik vind dat heel kwalijk en ja dat is ook gewoon een stukje van die mannelijkheid waar ik mezelf niet zo goed in kan vinden en dat ik eigenlijk niet zo begrijp waarom dat nog zo gebeurt in deze maatschappij zeg maar."

male, regardless of his gender expression. However, he discovered that he feels more comfortable presenting himself in a way that is more stereotypically masculine.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have focused more closely on the embodied dimension of masculinity, rather than the discursive dimension. Yet, similar conclusions can be drawn from this chapter as I have drawn from chapter 1. Just like transmasculine people relate to masculinity in diverse ways, they also embody (or refuse to embody) masculinity in diverse ways. Their embodiment of masculinity can be characterized by conformity, subversion, or disidentification. Among the informants, there were different ways of dealing with normative ideas and expectations surrounding masculinity. One way to deal with such expectations is to adapt one's expression or behavior to approximate those expectations. As I have shown, such adaptations were especially done by informants in the early stages of their transition, when they were not yet always perceived as male in interactions with others. When they were consistently read as male, they were able to express themselves more freely, although the pressure to conform did not cease to exist completely for all informants. Just like there are multiple ways in which transmasculine may conform to normative masculinities, there are also ways in which they can subvert what is considered to be normatively masculine, for instance by wearing nail polish or refusing to speak about women in a denigratory way. It is important to note that embodying masculinity in a normative or subversive way does not necessarily have to be the result of a conscious decision to either conform to, or deviate from normative masculinities. More commonly, the informants expressed that they simply sought to express themselves in a way that feels comfortable to them, regardless of the subversive or normative qualities of their embodiment. This was especially the case with regard to their choices of clothing, make-up, and accessories. Most of the informants distanced themselves more consciously from certain stereotypically masculine behaviors that they considered to be harmful to others, such as engaging in locker-room talk. Now that I have discussed the ways in which informants embody masculinity and the tensions between conformity and subversion in relation to interactions with cisgender others, I now move to a discussion of the normativity and (trans)masculinity in relation to trans communities.

## Chapter 3: Transnormativity and Masculinity within Trans Communities

In the previous two chapters, I have addressed the ways in which transmasculine people relate to and navigate normative masculinities, arguing that they navigate masculinities in diverse ways that can hold elements of conformity, opposition, or disidentification. Thus far, I have primarily focused on the ways in which they navigate such normative ideas in cisgender-dominated spaces, outside of trans communities. Trans communities can be seen as sites of resistance to such normative masculinities, or as spaces in which transmasculine people are "safe" from the normative expectations that they encounter in interactions with cisgender others. Yet, it would be a misconception to think that trans communities themselves are devoid of normative ideas and expectations surrounding masculinity. Although trans communities can serve as "safe spaces", or can be sites of resistance, they are also sites where norms about (trans) masculinity are produced, as well as reproduced. Because of the central role that trans communities play in the lives of many transmasculine people, which I will elaborate on in the following section, they also play a central role in shaping the ways in which transmasculine people relate to masculinity and construct their own masculinities. Therefore, to understand how transmasculine people relate to masculinity and navigate normative expectations of masculinity, it is essential to also take trans communities as a site in which masculinity is negotiated into consideration.

In this final chapter, I thus address normative conceptions of masculinity within trans communities. I argue that trans communities can be both sites of resistance to normative masculinities, and spaces in which normative ideas about masculinity are produced and reproduced, whether these be the same ideas that can be found in wider society, or ideas that are particular to trans communities. In this chapter, I address both offline and online trans communities. Yet, the focus of this chapter lies primarily with online communities, as all of the informants were members of such communities, and only a few of them were also active in in-person trans spaces. This has especially been the case in the last year, as in-person community groups have also been forced to move online due to COVID-19 restrictions. Moreover, it is important to note that while informants elaborated extensively on the behavioral norms in relation to the world outside of trans communities, they recognized fewer behavioral norms within trans communities, and elaborated much more extensively on normativity in relation to (trans)masculine bodies and transition choices. Therefore, the embodied aspects of (trans)masculinity are discussed at length in this chapter.

## Trans Communities

For most of the interviewees, being a member of online trans communities had been extremely valuable throughout their transition. As the call for participants for this research was posted in a Facebook group for Dutch-speaking transmasculine people, this was one of the online spaces in which the informants were most active. In addition to this specific group, there were also several other Facebook groups of which some of the informants were members, including groups for all trans people, groups that were specifically for non-binary people, groups in which information about specific surgeries is shared, or groups that were aimed at the LGBTQ+ community more broadly. Moreover, some of the informants also considered themselves to be a part of offline trans communities. Roan, for instance, was a member of a choir for trans people. Some of them had also attended support groups in the past, but none of them still regularly attended such groups in the present, because they no longer experienced a desire to do so.

The importance of online spaces for marginalized communities has been well-researched. Research on the experiences of LGBTQ+ people with online communities has shown that membership of such communities can lead to a decrease in suicidality and fear (Testa et al., 2014) greater resilience (Bariola et al., 2015), and decreased social isolation (Selkie et al., 2019). Sabrina Cipolletta and her team have researched online trans support systems in Italy. According to them, the main motivations for trans people to be members of an online community where (1) to share experiences, (2) to develop close relationships with other trans people, (3) to "test" oneself (e.g. test out a different name or pronouns), (4) to ask and offer help and advice, and (5) to reduce misinformation and prejudice (Cipolletta et al., 2017). Many of these motivations were echoed by my informants. They pointed out that trans communities were especially valuable in the early stages of their transition, as this allowed them to able to seek advice and read about the experiences of other transmasculine people. As they became more secure within their trans identity, and as the need for practical information about things like prosthetics, surgeries or health care providers lessened, interviewees became less dependent on online communities. Several of them noted that one of the main reasons for still being a member of those communities is to help other transmasculine people, for instance by sharing their experiences and giving advice. Arthur described his role within online trans communities as one of a mentor:

> "On Facebook I'm just in a couple of groups, just kind of being a mentor. I don't get much out of it, because I'm, well,

> 'finished' is such a stupid word, but there's just not as much that I need information on to be able to make certain decisions. So I'm just hanging around to be for other people what veterans were for me ten years ago."[31]

In addition to fulfilling a role as a mentor, interviewees like Arthur remained members of online communities to be able to occasionally ask a question if they had one, or to stay updated on the latest developments in transgender health care.

## Transnormativity

Because many interviewees mentioned feeling more understood, as well as safer, within trans communities than in predominantly cisgender-dominated spaces, I was curious to hear if they also experienced trans communities as "safe spaces" for the expression of non-normative masculinities, or refusals of masculinity. Therefore, I decided to ask if they also found that in comparison to wider society, trans communities are generally more accepting of non-normative masculinities. On this topic, Lucas said the following:

> "I think so. I also think that because you have been searching how to express yourself, that you can have a kind of empathy for people who are also searching for a way to express themselves more quickly, because you have also been through that. That as a trans person you can empathize more with someone and can understand where it comes from more than someone who has fit the ideal image from their birth, so who thinks about that a lot less."[32]

The idea that there is more room for non-normative masculinities within trans communities, because of a shared experience of having to negotiate one's gender expression, was echoed by many of the other informants. However, that trans communities are experienced as more

[31] Original: "Op Facebook zit ik gewoon in een aantal groepen, een beetje de mentor uit te hangen eigenlijk. Ik haal er zelf vrij weinig uit, omdat ik ja, klaar is zo'n stom woord altijd, maar er is gewoon niet zo veel meer waar ik informatie over nodig heb om bepaalde beslissingen te nemen. Dus ik hang daar gewoon rond om voor andere mensen te zijn wat veteranen tien jaar geleden voor mij waren."

[32] Original: "Dat denk ik wel. Ik denk ook omdat je zelf heel erg zoekt van hoe uit ik mezelf, dus dat je veel sneller een bepaalde inleving kan hebben voor mensen die ook zoeken naar een bepaalde manier om zich te uiten, omdat je dat zelf ook in zekere mate heb meegemaakt. Dat je als trans persoon je sowieso al meer kan inleven in iemand en kan begrijpen waar het vandaan komt dan iemand die eigenlijk van zijn geboorte al binnen dat ideaal plaatje past, dus daar in principe een stuk minder over nadenkt."

accepting does not mean that they are devoid of certain normative ideas about what is deemed properly masculine and how a transmasculine person should embody masculinity. From this research, it has become clear that there are certainly normative ideas of what a transmasculine or trans male body should look like, how transmasculine people should experience their gender, and how they should express their gender within transmasculine communities. The concept of transnormativity, which I have introduced in the introduction of this thesis, is useful in analyzing these normative ideas, as it describes the specific framework and expectations to which trans people are held accountable. As mentioned before, Austin Johnson argues that transnormativity "structures transgender experience, identification, and narratives into a hierarchy of legitimacy" (Johnson, 2016, p.464). This means that those trans people who comply with transnormative standards, are seen as the most legitimately trans, whereas those who deviate from what is normative may be seen as not "trans enough". Transnormative standards within transmasculine communities include undergoing specific surgeries, using hormones, and expressing oneself in a normative masculine way, and above all, as Spencer Garrison writes, "trans people must present a story of selfhood that not only claims affiliation with their preferred gender category, but also dis-claims affiliation with the sex category assigned to them at birth" in order to be recognized as "trans enough" (Garrison, 2018, p.618). The designation of some trans people as not "trans enough" is not only something that is utilized by trans people in relation to other trans people, by is also something that can be internalized. This can be exemplified by looking at what Ben Vincent found when conducting research among non-binary people for his book *Non-Binary Genders* (2020). When discussing legitimacy in relation to medical transition with non-binary people in the United Kingdom, he noticed that they did not think of other non-binary people who did not transition medically as *less* legitimate, but that they did view people who transitioned medically as *more* legitimate than themselves. Thus, according to Vincent, this shows that they "held themselves to different standards of validity, highlighting how the anxiety of 'realness' often operated at the level of the self" (Vincent, 2020, p.73). When conducting interviews for his master's thesis, Wallace Hudson found the same thing. Some of their informants felt as if they were not truly trans, because they did not conform to specific transnormative narratives (Hudson, 2017). Hudson argues that through the conceptualization of transness and transition in a very particular, narrowly defined way, a false trans authenticity is created. The idea is created that those people who do not conform to the authentic trans narrative, which is closely linked to a linear medical transition and a normative gender expression, are not truly trans. According to Garrison, concerns of not

being seen as "trans enough" are heightened among non-binary people, as they are more likely to be seen as not authentically trans, even within queer and trans communities (Garrison, 2018).

## Inter-community Differences

As mentioned before, most of the people that I have interviewed were members of various online groups, and some of them also interacted with trans people in offline spaces. Between different community groups, there are differences in the extent to which non-normative embodiments of masculinity or refusals of masculinity are accepted. The first difference that interviewees pointed to is the difference between online and offline interactions with other trans people. In Justin's experience, comments can be more negative in online spaces, because community members can be more anonymous.

> "I notice that when there's real life contact, people treat each other in a more respectful way, leave each other be and respect [each other], while in [group name] for example, the trans community on Facebook, there are stronger opinions, also in a negative way, because it's just easier to say something anonymously."[33]

At the same time, Justin, who is also friends with other transmasculine people outside of community spaces, also acknowledges that there are differences in how non-normative embodiments of transness are responded to within online trans groups and within his own friend circle.

> "And if there is a post in which trans men wear make-up and wear nail polish and show that off on Facebook and say 'Yo, boys, this is accepted, just be yourself' and people also respond to that positively, I do notice that there are trans men in my direct environment who then say, 'What the fuck is this?'"[34]

[33] Original: "Ik merk dat als er real life contact is, dat mensen toch respectvoller met elkaar omgaan, elkaar wat meer laten en respecteren. Terwijl er in de [groepsnaam] bijvoorbeeld, de transgender community op Facebook, wat meer uitgesproken meningen zijn ook in negatieve zin. Omdat het gewoon makkelijker is om soort van anoniem iets te zeggen."

[34] Original: "Als er dan post voorbij komt waar bepaalde trans mannen make-up dragen en nagellak dragen en daarmee pronken in Facebook en zeggen "Yo jongens, dit is gewoon geaccepteerd, wees lekker jezelf' en mensen daar ook positief op reageren, dan merk ik wel dat er trans mannen in mijn directe omgeving zijn die dan zeggen van "What the fuck is dit?""

This shows that even if online comments on a post are overwhelmingly positive, a post may still be perceived in a negative way by other community members, even if they do not express their thoughts within the community in which something is posted. This reflects the difficulty of judging the extent to which a community is accepting of non-normative embodiments based on the comments that people leave on a post.

Moreover, there are also differences between different online groups. Raj, for instance, is a member of a number of different queer and trans online community groups. According to them, groups of which the membership is primarily non-binary or genderqueer are the most accepting of non-normative embodiments of masculinity.

> "I'm also a part of non-binary and genderqueer platforms. There, norms are to be thrown anyway, so nothing that you propose or want to know more about is too strange. I think that's a little bit less the case in men's groups, although I think there's also more space for it there, but probably a little less than in genderqueer groups."[35]

Raj thus expressed that while groups for transgender men are becoming increasingly accepting of non-normative embodiments, these are not yet as normalized as they are in groups for non-binary people. Differences in the extent to which non-normative embodiments of masculinity, or of transness more generally, between different community groups thus continue to exist.

Finally, Arthur, who has lived in the United States for several years during the early stages of his transition, reflected on the differences between Dutch and American trans communities that he perceived. According to him, American society is more "rigid", and there is a bigger emphasis on "passing" and on looking as masculine as possible within American groups than there is within Dutch ones. He does not argue that the normative ideas that he encounters within American groups do not appear in Dutch groups, but that they are not as emphasized. This thus indicates a difference between Dutch and American community groups.

[35] Original: "Ik zit ook wel in non-binaire en genderqueer platforms. Daar zijn normen juist om weg te gooien, dus daar is eigenlijk niks te raar wat je voorstelt of waar je iets over wil weten. Ik denk dat dat iets minder is in de mannengroepen zeg maar, maar ook daar merk ik wel dat er meer ruimte is, maar waarschijnlijk iets minder dan in de genderqueer groepen."

## Transnormative Gender Expression and Behavior

Within trans communities, the informants of this research recognized transnormative ideas about masculinity in relation to different facets of their embodiment, such as their gender expression, physical characteristics, and transition choices. With regard to gender expression, the examples that informants named mostly referred to things one *should not* do, rather than things one *should* do, where the former generally referred to characteristics that are associated with femininity, and the latter to characteristics that are associated with masculinity. Many of the examples that interviewees addressed during the interviewees centered around three specific markers of femininity, namely wearing dresses, make-up, and nail polish. Raj was one of the informants who used the example of wearing a dress to show what transnormative discourse can look like.

> "If you as a trans man would say 'I want to put on a dress sometime', I think a lot of trans men would look at you strangely, because they are like "you are trans, so you are never going to wear a dress, because maybe you had to do that in the past and you did not like it, and now you should never want that again."[36]

What is normatively masculine within trans communities is thus sometimes constructed in direct opposition to what is feminine. To be properly masculine, one has to abstain from modes of expressing oneself that are associated with femininity. Therefore, markers of femininity such as nail polish, make-up, or dresses are to be avoided. There is a temporal element to this, as can be seen in Raj's words. Femininity is constructed as something that one should leave in the past. It is accepted that transmasculine people have expressed themselves in stereotypically feminine ways before they came out as trans, especially if they have been forced to do so. A voluntary continued expression of femininity in the future, however, may be frowned upon. Someone who has personally experienced negative comments about his gender expression is Dirk, who regularly performs as a drag queen.

> "Within the trans community, I also sometimes hear things like 'Yes, but don't you think you're making a fool of yourself?' or 'You fought so hard to be who you are and then you dress up as

[36] Original: "Als je als trans man zou zeggen "ik wil wel eens een keer een jurk aan", dan word je denk ik heel raar aangekeken door heel veel trans mannen, omdat ze zoiets hebben van "je bent trans, dus je gaat nooit meer een jurk dragen, want vroeger moest je dat misschien en dat vond je niet leuk en nu zou je dat nooit meer moeten willen."

> someone else.' Yeah, and there is a small part of the trans community who think that drag is kind of making fun of trans people."[37]

Both within and outside of trans communities, Dirk has been exposed to negative comments on his profession as a drag queen. In similar fashion to what Raj describes, the comments that Dirk receives imply that femininity is something to be left in the past, and not something to return to voluntarily. Because Dirk has "fought so hard" to be who he is, to be recognized as male, it is assumed that he must therefore discard any association with femininity, let alone publicly perform as a drag queen, which is seen as a symbol of emphasized femininity. This quote also highlights something that I will return to later on in this chapter, namely that one person's gender non-conformity is at times perceived as a threat to the wider trans community.

## Normatively (Trans)Masculine Bodies

In addition to norms about gender expression, there are also certain normative ideas about what a transmasculine body should look like within trans communities. According to each of the interviewees, this is also the case in some of the online communities in which they are active. To some extent, these normative ideas correspond to what is seen as normative more broadly in Dutch society, such as that the ideal masculine body is thin and muscular. There are, however, also some normative ideas that are very specific to trans bodies, or that are emphasized more within trans communities than they are within wider society. Within trans communities, trans people are thus held accountable to both hegemonic standards of masculinity and specific transnormative standards (Johnson, 2016).

As I have mentioned earlier on in this chapter, transnormativity is dependent upon a binary medical model. Because this is the case, messages of not being "trans enough" are closely linked to specific medical transition choices. More specifically, within transmasculine communities, it is linked to choices surrounding the usage of testosterone, as well as surgeries such as top surgery, hysterectomies, or bottom surgeries.[38] Reflecting on transnormative standards within trans communities, Ivo described that he noticed that there are varying

[37] Original: "Binnen de trans gemeenschap hoor ik ook wel eens van "ja, maar vind je dan niet dat je jezelf belachelijk maakt" of "nou heb je zo hard gevochten om te zijn wie je bent en dan ga je je weer verkleden als iemand anders". Ja, en er is een klein deel van de trans gemeenschap die drag sowieso een soort van het belachelijk maken van trans personen vindt."

[38] Within trans communities, mastectomies are commonly referred to with the term 'top surgery', whereas genital surgeries are referred to as 'bottom surgery'. As these terms correspond more closely to the terms that the informants used, I will be using these in the remainder of the chapter.

perspectives among trans men on what makes someone a trans man and what makes someone masculine. According to him, there are at times discussions about the usage of testosterone and about specific surgeries. He notes that he still comes across trans men within trans communities who believe that if you do not take testosterone, or do not transition medically, you are not a 'real' trans man:

> "Just recently I was shocked, because someone had gotten his chest and uterus surgery, but did not want to start testosterone, and I was shocked by the comments, that there were many like 'are you not going to start testosterone?' and that many people thought it was strange that this person had surgery but did not start testosterone."[39]

In the example that Ivo described, the transition choices of the person in question did not line up with what is normative, which is to first start testosterone and then pursue surgeries. Within transmasculine communities, the usage of testosterone is especially central to what Borck et al. call "the medical script of transitioning" and an integral aspect of transnormative masculinity (Borck et al., 2019, p.639). Because the person that Ivo refers to decided not to use testosterone, they thus deviate from the normative medical script of transitioning. As this medical script is what is recognized as "normal" within trans communities, a lack of desire to start testosterone in considered to be strange by many, especially by those who experience a strong desire to start testosterone themselves, and who consider this to be an essential step in their own transition. Spencer Garrison argues that Hormone Replacement Therapy and other medical interventions have a legitimizing effect. This means that those who undergo these interventions "earn" a degree of legitimacy (Garrison, 2018). Trans people who decide not to undergo these interventions, in contrast, are more likely to have their identities questioned, both by other trans people, cisgender peers, and medical professionals.

With regard to surgeries, top surgery was named by Raj and Ivo as the type of surgery that is most expected within transmasculine communities. It is not only expected that a transmasculine person has a desire to undergo top surgery, but also that, if possible, they undergo a specific type of top surgery which leaves minimal scarring. When asked to reflect on physical norms within trans communities, Bob described his experiences with choosing

[39] Original: "Ik merkte laatst dat ik er nog heel erg over schrok, omdat iemand dus wel zijn borst en baarmoeder operatie had gedaan maar niet aan de testosteron wou, en toen schrok ik gewoon van de reacties, dat er gewoon heel veel onder stond van "waarom ga je niet aan de testosteron?" en dat mensen dat heel vreemd vonden dat diegene dan wel werd geopeerd maar niet aan de testosteron ging."

which type of top surgery to choose. He could either opt for the type of top surgery that would leave minimal scarring, or for a type of top surgery that would give him two significant scars on his chest. Although Bob had a preference for the latter option, his surgeon's first preference was the former, because according to him, having minimal scarring looks more beautiful. As a result, Bob felt pressured by his surgeon to opt for the type of surgery that did not have his preference. Because he was unsure about what to do in this situation, he asked for advice in an online group for transmasculine people. One response to his post especially stuck with him.

> "I then got a comment that I shouldn't complain, because pretty much everyone wants to get the donut [option with minimal scarring] and that my problem is actually kind of a 'first world problem'. So yeah, that did make me feel a kind of pressure."[40]

Because Bob was eligible for the type of surgery that is seen as the most desirable by many transmasculine people, but that is only accessible as a viable option to some, his struggle was seen as illegitimate to the person who left this comment. Because Bob diverges from the option that is (trans)normatively defined as the option that a transmasculine person ought to prefer, his dilemma was not recognized by everyone as a legitimate dilemma. According to Bob, the comment that he received reflected the idea that the transmasculine body should approach a cisgender male body as closely as possible, which is one of the central characteristics of transnormativity. By electing the type of surgery that leaves visible scarring, Bob is not choosing the option that most closely approximates a cisgender male chest. For him, it was more important that his results look aesthetically pleasing to him, than it was to have a result that more closely resembles a cisgender ideal.

## Emphasized Masculine Characteristics

Thus far, I have discussed some of the normative physical characteristics that are particular to transmasculine bodies. There are also some physical characteristics which are also associated with masculinity outside of trans communities, but which are emphasized even more among transmasculine people with (online) communities. The first of these characteristics that was mentioned by several informants, is that within trans communities, beards are seen as a marker of masculinity. When reflecting on the significance of beards, Roan described that he

[40] Original: "Toen had ik ook een opmerking gekregen dat ik eigenlijk niet moet klagen, omdat iedereen eigenlijk het liefste de donut wil en dat mijn probleem eigenlijk een soort 'first world problem was'. Dus ja, daar voelde ik toen wel een soort druk van."

experiences a mismatch between how beards are perceived within transmasculine communities and how they are experienced among the cisgender men in his life. Within transmasculine communities, beards are seen as the ultimate marker of masculinity, whereas they do not necessarily have the same level of significance among cisgender men.

> "I also say that no one is allowed to touch my beard, because I'm not going to get rid of it, and then my dad and my brother say 'you should shave that, you don't want a dirty beard, do you?' and then I think 'huh? Different world'. If I were to say this in [name of trans Facebook group] everyone would be like 'wow, but you have such a good beard!'".[41]

As is touched upon in Roan's example, because beards are treated as an ultimate marker of masculinity within trans communities, someone's decision to shave off their facial hear can lead to comments from people who do not understand why someone who has the ability to grow a beard would decide to shave it off.

Another characteristic that, according to Justin, is especially emphasized within transmasculine communities was being able to pee standing up. According to Justin, this emphasis is especially visible in discussions around bottom surgeries, as being able to pee standing up is one of the reasons that is commonly named by transmasculine people to opt for a specific type of surgery in which the urethra is lengthened.

> "For many cis men, being able to pee standing up is not really a sign of masculinity, while for a lot of trans men, me included, it is a sign of masculinity. Because *having* to pee sitting down is a sign of femininity, with which I don't identify. Because of that, being able to pee standing up is automatically very important." [emphasis original][42]

[41] Original: "Ik zeg zelf ook van niemand moet aan mijn baard komen, want dat ga ik echt er niet af halen. En dan zeggen mijn vader en mijn broertje van dat scheer je toch, je wilt toch niet zo'n vieze baard. En dan denk ik "hè? Andere wereld." Als ik dit in brotherhood is het echt zo van "wow, maar je hebt een goeie baard!""

[42] Original: "Voor heel veel cis mannen is staand kunnen plassen niet echt een teken van mannelijkheid, terwijl dat voor heel veel trans mannen, ook voor mij, wel een teken is van mannelijkheid. Omdat het zittend *moeten* plassen een teken is van vrouwelijkheid, waar ik mezelf niet mee identificeer, waardoor automatisch het staand kunnen plassen heel belangrijk is."

Just like beards are seen as a marker of masculinity for many, being able to pee standing up is also seen as an important marker of masculinity for some. For Justin, this is not only the case because he perceives standing to pee in and of itself as something particularly masculine, but also because he associates having to sit down to pee closely with femininity.

## Changing Normativities and Friction within Trans Communities

What is seen as normative, and how much room there is within trans communities for people to deviate from normative masculinities, is also subject to change. Most of the informants noted that in recent years, trans communities have become much more accepting of alternative embodiments of masculinity. When reflecting on what has changed within online transmasculine communities in recent years, Raj said the following:

> "I know that there are trans men who used to label themselves as trans man, but now as something more fluid, and that there are a lot of people who now say 'Yes, I actually like nail polish and shit like that', so that causes those norms to broaden in a pretty short period of time. It has gone from the very binary 'I am a man and I have to behave like this and look like this' to 'yes, that's allowed, but if you want to wear a dress as a man that is also fine.'"[43]

This sentiment was echoed by Justin, Ivo, Dirk and Arthur. Justin, Dirk, and Ivo associated this development with the increased presence of non-binary people in online transmasculine communities. Some of them took the Facebook group in which the call for participants for this research was posted as an example. Over the last couple of years, the membership of this group has become more diverse. Whereas it started off as a group primarily geared towards transgender men, it has shifted to being a space for AFAB (Assigned Female At Birth) trans people more broadly. According to Justin, Dirk and Ivo, the increased presence of non-binary people within this group has caused non-normative masculinities, or refusals of masculinity, to become more visible and more accepted. As people have become more exposed to such non-normative embodiments, they are increasingly becoming normalized within trans communities.

[43] Original: "Ik weet dat er trans mannen zijn die zich ooit zich labelde als trans man en nu als meer fluide zeg maar en dat er heel veel mensen zijn die nu zeggen van "Ja maar ik vind nagellak en dat soort shit wel leuk", dus dat dat er voor zorgt dat die normen allemaal wat breder zijn geworden in een best wel korte tijd, is er veel meer ruimte onstaan van dat hele binaire "ik ben een man en ik moet me zo strak gedragen en ik moet er zo uit zien" naar "ja, dat mag, maar als jij een jurk aan wil als man dan kan dat ook prima.""

While not all characteristics have now become normalized, there is an increased recognition and acceptance of the diversity of transmasculine experiences and embodiments. This is supported by the research of Ben Vincent, who also found that non-binary people, and diverse embodiments of transness, are increasingly recognized within trans communities (Vincent, 2020).

Yet, as is the case in wider society, not all members of transmasculine communities are accepting of non-normative masculinities. The increased visibility of trans people with a non-normative gender expression can at times also lead to conflict or friction among trans people, a point that I will elaborate on in more detail in the paragraphs that follow. When reflecting on normativity in relation to masculinity within trans communities, several of the informants express that in their experience, there is a split between two different groups within the transmasculine community. Justin, for instance, used the term *tweestrijd* to describe the tension between these groups, a word which signifies a conflict between two oppositional groups. The first group that interviewees, such as Justin, refer to is a group of binary transgender men who embody a more traditional type of masculinity, and who wish to maintain normative conceptions of masculinity, transness, and the relation between the two. The second group that is described by a few of the interviewees consists of people who present themselves in a non-normative way. Interesting to note is that several interviewees associated non-normative transmasculine embodiments directly with non-binary gender identities, even though it is not only non-binary people who can have a non-normative gender expression, nor does being non-binary have to mean that you have a non-normative gender expression. Arthur, for instance, identifies as non-binary but presents himself in a stereotypically masculine way. In their research, Vincent also found that non-binary identities are currently closely associated with anti-normative embodiments, while binary trans identities are neither fully associated with anti-normative embodiments, nor with normative embodiments (Vincent, 2020). Of course, not all members of online trans communities can be divided into either of these two oppositional groups. Roan, for example, positions himself as a member of the group "who do not really care" about the ways in which other trans people express themselves. He explains that he is accepting of people who use make-up, wear dresses, or want to get pregnant, but that he himself does not have the desire to do those things, nor does he have the desire to go the gym and always look hyper-masculine. As recognized by informants like Roan, there is a large group of people who may not express

themselves in a non-normative way, but who are very much accepting of other members of the community who do express themselves in such a way.

Although the division of trans communities into the two different groups that I have presented here is thus not as clear-cut, the friction between these groups is very real. When reflecting on friction between different groups within transmasculine communities, Dirk expressed that he has noticed that some of the people who belong to the first group experience the inclusion of non-binary people and the increased acceptance of alternative masculinities as a threat, in part because they believe the inclusion of non-binary people and of people with non-normative embodiments are a threat to validity and boundaries of the trans community as a whole.

> "There is a small group that kind of sees it as an attack on their idea of what being trans is. A little bit like: 'I have fought very hard to be seen for who I am and now this is the image of how I want to be seen, but you call yourself the same thing as I do, but do not fit that [image].' That's kind of what's happening. You take away from my label."[44]

Ben Vincent, too, recognizes that trans community tensions are increasingly taking place along a "binary versus non-binary line" (Vincent, 2020, p.37). What Dirk describes here, can be interpreted as an occurrence of what Vincent describes as "self-validation through the denigration of others" (Vincent, 2020, p.98). As some (primarily binary-identified trans people) experience the existence of non-normative trans people as a threat to the validity of their own transness, they seek to affirm themselves by maintaining the boundaries of what, according to them, transness is. Similarly to Dirk, Raj also points to the existence of some friction between non-binary people and transgender men. "Sometimes you see a comment like "because of them" – and that refers to non-binary people – "are we no longer taken seriously." So, I think that every now and then there's a bit of friction."[45] The fear that some transgender men have, as exemplified by the comment that Raj names as an example, is that

[44] Original: "Er is een groepje die dat een soort van als een aanval op hun idee van wat trans zijn is zien. Dus een beetje zo van: "ik heb heel hard gevochten om gezien te worden wie ik ben en nu is dit het plaatje zoals ik gezien wil worden, maar jij noemt jezelf hetzelfde als ik, maar jij past daar niet in". Dat is eigenlijk wat er een beetje gebeurt. Jij doet af aan mijn labeltje."

[45] Original: "Soms vind je toch een uitspraak als "door hen" - en dat gaat dan over non-binaire mensen – "worden wij niet meer serieus genomen." Dus er zit af en toe wel iets van wrijving denk ik."

the inclusion of non-binary and gender non-conforming people poses a threat to the acceptance and validity of transgender men with a normative gender expression.

Pregnancy was another example of a topic that causes tension within transmasculine communities, which was named by both Raj and Arthur. Again, a split between opposing groups is mentioned. With regard to this topic, Arthur distinguishes between two groups, the first one being "a group who thinks "if you have the parts and you want to have a child, why not?"", and the second one being a group who thinks "don't you want to be a man? Then why would you get pregnant, that is for women." While Arthur has merely observed the friction between these two groups from a distance, Raj has first-hand experience with it. Raj has previously undergone both top surgery and phalloplasty, and has not had their uterus and ovaries removed. To not remove their uterus and ovaries was a conscious decision for Raj, because they have a desire to become pregnant. I would argue that the normative trajectory of a transmasculine transition would be that one first has top surgery, then a hysterectomy, and finally one of the different kinds of genital surgery, although there is increasingly more room to diverge from this normative trajectory. Because Raj deviates from what is normative, they have occasionally received negative comments, or comments that reflect a confusion about their decision to attempt to become pregnant, when sharing their experiences and asking for advice within online trans communities,

> "It is automatically assumed that you want to have your uterus and ovaries removed, so if you then say 'well, I want to have children and I want to carry the child myself', that's a big shock for many people."[46]

From the responses that Raj gets when they speak openly about their desire to carry a child, it becomes clear that there are certain normative ideas of what a transmasculine person should or should not do with their body. Pregnancy is something that for many is very closely linked to femininity. Because the assumption is that transmasculine people want to approximate a cisgender male body as closely as possible and want to avoid everything that is associated with femininity, transmasculine people who have a desire to become pregnant are frowned upon.

[46] Original: "Er wordt gewoon zo automatisch vanuit gegaan dat je je baarmoeder en eierstokken weg wilt, dus als je dan zegt "ja, maar ik heb een kinderwens en ik wil zelf een kind dragen", dan is dat toch voor veel mensen wel een hele shock."

## Non-normativity as Normative

Thus far, I have addressed some of the ways in which transmasculine people recognize a certain pressure to conform to normative conceptions of masculinity within trans communities. Yet, Roan also experienced pressure at times to subvert, instead of to conform to, normative masculinities. In his experience, it is to some extent becoming normative within trans communities to deviate from societal norms. He explained that he sometimes feels like he does not fully fit in within trans communities, because he lives a life that may be considered as too "standard", or normative, by others.

> "You can perhaps say about me: 'Well, you are just a standard man, you have two kids, you have a wife, you have a job, you look like a man.' At times they can kind of attack you, almost as if you are not a real trans man or something like that. You can get that feeling."[47]

Roan thus at times feels as if he is too "standard" and does not deviate from "the norm" enough to fit in within trans communities. As a result, he at times feels like he is not "trans enough". That there is more room to deviate from heteronormative standards is part of the appeal and importance of trans communities for many (Vincent, 2020). Yet, Roan at times experiences this deviation from heteronormative standards as an expectation that he cannot, or does not want to meet. In his experience, what is normative within trans communities is thus partially very different from what is normative in wider society. Interestingly, deviating from what is normative may actually become normative itself in some communities. Related to this, Arthur described that he sometimes feels as if he does not quite fit in in specifically non-binary communities. He emphasized that he has not experienced that others pressure him to be more non-conforming, or that he is not accepted by other non-binary people, but that he still sometimes feels like he is too different from many other non-binary people, because he does not present himself in a typically queer or gender-nonconforming way.

In most other empirical studies on transnormativity and masculinity, an experienced pressure to subvert gender normativity has not arisen as a noteworthy theme (i.e. Borck et al., 2019; Garrison, 2018). However, Chase Catalano, in his research on transnormativity among

[47] Original: "Je kan bij mij misschien ook zeggen: "Nou je bent gewoon een standaard man, je hebt twee kinderen, je hebt een vrouw, je hebt gewoon een baan, je ziet er gewoon uit als een man." Dan kunnen ze je nog wel eens aanvallen op dat gebied soort van, alsof je bijna niet een echte trans man bent ofzo. Zo'n idee kan je wel eens krijgen."

trans students in higher education, found something similar. A few of their participants "indexed "trans" as subverting the gender binary by embodying a liminal gender" (Catalano, 2015, p. 419). For these participants, transness was linked to a subversion of gender normativity. Therefore, some of the participants that presented themselves in a normatively masculine way, did not feel "trans enough". However, for most participants, both Catalano's research and my own, feeling "trans enough" remained predicated on conforming to normative standards, rather than subverting them. Yet, it may be the case that as trans communities are evolving and non-normative embodiments of transness or masculinity are becoming more commonplace, it can become increasingly normative to subvert gender normativity. Perhaps, the experiences of Arthur and Roan signal an upcoming change in what expressions of transness are seen as normative within trans communities. It is important to note though, that while it is certainly positive that non-normative embodiments of transness are becoming more accepted, if the subversion of gender normativity becomes not only normalized, but also normative itself, there will still be people who deviate from these normative ideas and who will feel as if they do not completely fit in within trans communities, because they do not subvert normative masculinities enough to be considered 'properly' trans. What is considered to be normative and what is considered to be non-normative may shift, but that does not mean that the distinction between normative and non-normative embodiments of transness or masculinity will cease to exist.

## Conclusions

Trans communities have had a positive impact on all of the informants. This was especially the case in the earlier stages of their transition, when they regularly turned to other community members for advice, information, and support. In this chapter, I have shown that despite their positive impact on the lives of many trans people, trans communities are not devoid of (trans)normative ideas surrounding masculinity. Trans communities are both sites of resistance to normative masculinities, and sites where normative masculinities are (re)produced. Within trans communities, transmasculine people are exposed to both the same ideas that they are exposed to in cisgender-dominated spaces, and to ideas that are particular to trans communities. One of the differences between the findings of this chapter and of the previous chapters, is that the transnormative ideas that circulate within trans communities from which informants experience the most pressure concern the (trans)masculine body. Outside of trans communities, behavioral norms had a larger impact on the ways in which the informants negotiate their embodiment of masculinity. Some of the transnormative ideas that

are prevalent within trans communities, according to the informants, include the idea that a transmasculine person should strive for a body that approximates a cisgender ideal, should express themselves in a stereotypically masculine manner, and should not desire the expression of femininity. However, such transnormative ideas are subject to change, and are increasingly being challenged, albeit not without friction. As these ideas are increasingly challenged, the subversion of normative conceptions of (trans)masculinity may become what is seen as normative within trans communities in the future.

## Concluding Thoughts: Doing Masculinity Differently

The aim of this research was to explore how Dutch transmasculine people construct their relationship to masculinity and navigate normative understandings of masculinity, both within and outside of trans communities. Through interviews with eight Dutch transgender men and non-binary people, I was able to gain insight into this main research question, as well as into the three sub-questions along which I have structured my thesis. In the first chapter, I have addressed how transmasculine people define and construct their relationship to masculinity discursively, and have argued that they relate to masculinities in diverse ways and construct their relationships to masculinity in relation to normative constructions of masculinity. In chapter 2, I have focused on how transmasculine people navigate their own embodiment of masculinity in relation to normative structures in their daily lives. I have argued that masculinity is embodied in diverse, often disidentifactory ways. Moreover, I have argued that the ways in which informants express themselves is dependent on the particular situation that they are in. In situations in which presenting oneself in a non-normative way can come at a cost, informants were more likely to conform to normative masculinities. In the final chapter, I have shown what normative masculinities look like within trans communities, and how trans people navigate their own masculinities in relation to those communities. I have argued that trans communities can be site of resistance to normative masculinities, but also sites in which norms about masculinity are (re)produced.

The overarching argument that has run through each of these chapters is that transmasculine people negotiate and navigate masculinities in relation to (trans)normative structures in diverse ways. Their relationships to masculinity can hold elements of conformity, subversion, or disidentification. How they relate to masculinity, and embody masculinity, is not merely a product of their own personal preferences, but is also influenced by (trans)normative ideas both outside of and within trans communities. The ways in which they experience masculinity are influenced by normative constructions of masculinities, transness, and the combination of the two. Such normative constructions are always changing, both in wider society, and within trans communities. What has also yet again become clear from my research, is that there is no such thing as a single trans masculinity. While I have certainly come across some commonalities in the ways in which the informants relate to masculinity, the differences between them were just as plentiful.

Throughout my research, I have made non-cisgender male experiences of masculinity, including non-binary experiences, central to my analysis, making my approach a different

one than what is used in most existing research on masculinities. I believe that in order to understand masculinity, we need to look beyond its close association with cisgender men. That there is a distinction between masculinity and maleness is a commonly accepted fact among scholars of masculinity. However, as I have elaborated on in the introduction of this thesis, the reality is that masculinity continues to be primarily studied in relation to the experiences of cisgender men. In some of this existing research, masculinity and maleness are conflated. By making non-cisgender male embodiments of masculinity central to my analysis, I have approached masculinity as something that is completely severed from cisgender maleness. This is not merely reflected in my own theoretical and methodological approach, but also in the experiences of my informants. In much of the existing research on trans masculinities, it has been taken as self-evident that transgender men and transmasculine non-binary people have a desire to embody masculinity. It may be recognized that what embodying masculinity means may differ from person to person, as everyone person relates to masculinity in their own way. Yet, the very idea that transmasculine people must automatically desire to embody masculinity is rarely challenged. Especially for transgender men, it is taken as self-evident that because they are male, they must also be masculine. The informants of my own research, however, did challenge this idea. Most of them did not see it as self-evident at all that masculinity was something that they needed to embody at all times. Some of them even desired to stop thinking about modes of expression, behaviors, and personality traits in gendered ways altogether, and felt a disconnect in relation to terms like masculinity and masculine.

This does not mean that all informants refused any association with masculinity. Some of them expressed a desire to redefine what masculinity means to them and sought to "do" masculinity differently, but did think of themselves, or of certain characteristics that they possessed, as masculine. Embodying masculine characteristics, for them, could also lead to feelings of gender euphoria. Although the negotiation of masculinities in relation to normativity has been the central focus of this paper, I want to reiterate here that the ways in which trans people express their gender does not merely have to be the result of a conscious decision to either conform to or subvert normative structures. A masculine gender expression, for instance, is not necessarily the result of a conscious decision to conform to normative masculinities in order to avoid negative consequences. Similarly, a more stereotypically feminine gender expression, also does not have to be the result of a deliberate decision to be subversive. Above all, the informants expressed that simply sought to express themselves in

the ways that felt most comfortable to them. For some, that meant expressing themselves in a stereotypically masculine manner. For others, that meant expressing themselves in a non-normative manner.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

While my research has given valuable insight into the ways in which transmasculine people negotiate masculinities, it has raised just as many new questions that are still to be explored. Perhaps one of the biggest limitations of this research is the limited diversity among the informants in terms of race/ethnicity. Because Dutch hegemonic masculinity is closely linked to whiteness, it would be valuable to explore how people of color relate to normative conceptions of masculinity, and navigate normative structures. Additionally, something that I have touched upon in this research, but that might be worth expanding upon in future research, is the topic of normativity within non-binary community spaces.

Another point that would be interesting to research further, is the ways in which transmasculine people use and relate to terms like 'queer' and 'feminine'. In chapter 2, I have addressed the fact that Dirk preferred to use the term 'queer' to refer to characteristics that are commonly referred to as feminine, as queer is a less gendered term, and by using this term, he eliminates the feelings of discomfort that thinking of himself as feminine would cause. Future research could explore the potential for queerness as an alternative way of thinking about subversion and non-normativity. In doing so, it would be interesting to also take the experiences of trans people that have been assigned male at birth into account.

The question of what trans embodiments of masculinity do to masculinity more generally, has also not been sufficiently addressed by this research. Further research could explore in more detail what impact non-normative trans masculinities have on the boundaries of what we see as masculine. This could be interesting to discuss in relation to the question of what it means to "trans" masculinity. Related to this question of what transness does to masculinity, is the question of whether studying masculinity as a subject reinforces gendered thinking and the categorization of certain characteristics as either masculine or feminine. Does studying masculinity as something distinctly different from femininity contribute to the maintenance to this very categorization that I – and many of my informants - wish to contest? Can we ever arrive at a society in which everyone is fully able to express themselves in whichever way they may desire, if we continue thinking about personal characteristics using such gendered term? These are questions which conducting this research has led me to

consider, but that I do not yet have an answer to. What I do know, is that many of my informants found the categorization of behavioral and physical expressions as either feminine or masculine quite arbitrary and limiting. To quote Lucas, one of my informants, "of course you have certain character traits or interests, but categorizing them into masculine or feminine, that's not necessarily very natural."[48] Because what is seen as masculine and what is seen as feminine is arbitrary and, as Lucas says, unnatural, normative constructions of masculinity are increasingly contested. Perhaps the contestation and subversion of normative masculinities will lead to an "undoing" of masculinity, and we are approaching a future in which we will no longer think of gender expression in terms of masculinity and femininity. Or, perhaps it will lead to a "doing differently" of masculinity and femininity, where these terms continue to be used, but are no longer experienced as constraining and normative as they commonly are in the present. Regardless of what the future will bring, to reflect the diverse ways in which masculinity is experienced, there should be space for all embodiments (or refusals) of masculinity, whether these be normative or non-normative, as long as they are not harmful to others.

[48] Original: "Je hebt natuurlijk wel karaktertrekken of interesse, alleen die categoriseren in mannelijk of vrouwelijk, dat is niet per se heel natuurlijk ofzo."

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