

# “This Time, We’re the Ones Who’ll Be Treated Like Royalty”

Masculinist Discourses in Online Sexual Transformation Media

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project is to offer an analysis of the reactionary discourses which underpin a new form of internet media narratives referred to as “TG”, which represent fantastic scenarios in which male characters become female, usually against their will. While the name “TG” is taken from a contraction of “transgender”, existing literature on trans\* representation in fiction does not provide an adequate analysis of “TG”, as “TG” engages with its own distinct series of themes.

This project’s contribution to knowledge is the isolation and analysis of these themes, which are heavily informed by contemporary postfeminist discourse, in particular the argument that women can now “have it all” while men remain oppressed by the demands of masculinity. This is accomplished through content analysis of over five hundred “TG” media texts, coding for themes identified in a review of literature pertaining to trans\* representation, the ontology of gender, postfeminist and antifeminist discourses. This ultimately leads to an understanding of “TG” media as engaging with what this project calls Social Inversion.

Social Inversion narratives function by positioning a male character in a social situation in which they suffer, then transforming that character from male to female and subsequently representing that same social situation as now being beneficial. The project identifies three broad forms of Social Inversion – “Rejected to Desired”, “Restrained to Free” and “Ordinary to Supernatural” – and analysed them with reference to key “TG” media texts. This reveals that, rather than a straightforwardly antifeminist polemic, “TG” media is more interested in articulating anxiety over contradictions in postfeminist masculinity.

However, while these “TG” media texts demonstrate an acute understanding that masculinity itself is limiting, unnatural and harmful to men’s mental health, the masculinist standpoint of “TG” media prevents it from envisioning a world without male dominance and strict binary gender roles. This masculinist standpoint also influences “TG” media’s representation of femininity, reproducing discourses which elide the oppression of women and present femininity as innately empowering, pleasurable and unproblematic.

The project concludes that “TG” media’s portrayal of a damaging and oppressive masculinity contrasted with an innately pleasurable and rewarding femininity makes it a useful heuristic for understanding contemporary masculine anxiety.

## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis contains no material by myself that has been accepted any other award, degree or diploma. It also contains no material written by another without due reference.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Richard Pilbeam', is written above a solid horizontal line.

Richard Pilbeam

10/12/2017

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This project's object of study is a genre of online narrative visual media (a combination of comics, animations and live action video productions) referred to by its authors and audience as "TG", which creates fantasy scenarios in which cisgender men are transformed into women. The purpose of this project is to offer an analysis of the assumptions around gender which inform these "TG" narratives, using content analysis on a corpus of over five hundred "TG" media texts in order to identify significant, recurring discourses, and then analysing these discourses with reference to existing sociology, gender studies and feminist literature.

"TG" is, in this context, a contraction of "transgender", and has been used to identify "TG" media since its emergence in the late 1990's. As will be demonstrated in Chapters 5 and 6, however, this "TG" media demonstrates no interest in the lives or subjectivities of real world trans\* individuals, making the name both technically inaccurate and a potentially offensive appropriation of trans\* experience. Unfortunately, as "TG" media repeatedly and consistently refers to itself as such, it is impossible to avoid the terminology entirely. For this reason, the project has elected to identify the material using "TG" in quotation marks, signalling that, while it may refer to itself this way, "TG" media is distinct from trans\* media, and the two should not be conflated.

The "TG" narratives discussed in this project foreground a character who undergoes a fantastical transformation, involving magic or science fiction, in which their body's primary and secondary sexual characteristics become that of the opposite sex. The prefix "TG" is

applied to this media by its creators in order to signal to their audience that the media contains “TG” content, so that, for example, a comic with “TG” themes will bill itself as a “TG comic”, an animated morph sequence will call itself a “TG transformation animation”, a mixed media archive will describe its content as “TG media”, and so on. This project focuses primarily on “TG” comics, as they are the most numerous, although some films and animations are also discussed; for this reason, the project uses the blanket term “TG media” throughout. The creators of “TG” media are rarely identified publicly, instead using online aliases, and cater to an audience that has, in some cases, been large enough to sustain a professional “TG” career.

Presently, no dedicated academic or mainstream studies of “TG” media exist, with examinations of the genre by outsiders limited to articles on comedy websites such as *Your Webcomic Is Bad And You Should Feel Bad* (David, 2007), *Something Awful* (Boruff, 2005) and *Abject Suffering* (Butterfield & Ross, 2016), which have humorously mocked examples of “TG” media for their perceived poor artistic quality and strange subject matter. It was through material such as this that I was first made aware of “TG” media, and subsequently developed an interest in the way it focused on transforming its characters’ social situations, rather than focusing purely on the transformed physical body. Existing studies of media which deals with superficially similar subject matter to “TG” media – trans\* characters, cross-dressing and fantasy transformation – are, however, insufficient when applied to “TG” media, as it possesses its own unique set of narrative tropes and character archetypes, and engages differently with contemporary discourses around gender. As Chapters 2, 5 and 6 will later demonstrate, not only is “TG” media a distinct entity from “any media featuring a character whose sex changes”, it frequently ignores, if not inverts, what are currently

understood as the key features of such stories, instead focusing on issues of male identity and the pressures of contemporary masculinity. Given that “TG” media was popular enough to gain the attention of outsiders and sustain professional careers, a formal study of this odd, emergent genre was sorely needed.

As will be discussed in Chapter 5, almost all narratives produced by the “TG” media community centre on a male character who becomes female, with the few female-to-male transformations usually the by-product of a man and a woman exchanging bodies. Characters in “TG” media have their bodies transformed not through surgery, hormone replacement or prosthetics, but rather an array of magical spells, science experiments, alien abductions, genies’ wishes, vampire bites, teleportation accidents, and other fantastical means. These transformed male characters are then immediately accepted as cisgender women, with their new bodies physically read as female, and their ability to perform an exaggerated, extreme form of femininity – high heels, cosmetics, body language, and so on – coming to them “naturally”, as though it is simply second nature to the new body. In other words, these “TG” narratives are about characters who experience the world as both a heteronormative man and a heteronormative woman, not trans\* characters who occupy an unstable space in between. Because of “TG” media’s focus on characters who live as both heteronormative men and heteronormative women, this project was designed on the basis that “TG” media is not interested in articulating issues related to trans\* experience – something which Chapters 5 and 6 will confirm – but rather in contrasting perceived differences between the experiences of men and women by having its characters experience life as both.

Given that the overwhelming majority of these “TG” narratives are about male characters becoming female, they present the male experience as the “normal” baseline against which the female experience is compared, and the comparison is inevitably favourable: Women in “TG” narratives have more freedom, more opportunities, receive preferential treatment, are more emotionally stable, have better sex, are more popular, and are surrounded by fawning men who will do anything in exchange for their attention and approval. Men, on the other hand, are routinely presented as miserable, paranoid, socially isolated and inhibited by the limited range of acceptable masculine behaviours. The title of this thesis is itself paraphrased from the “TG” comic *Infinite Stories 2* (Infinity Sign, 2013a) discussed in Chapter 7, and is broadly representative of the genre’s representation of gendered experiences. That is, men are subordinated to women and these stories represent a fantasy where they can have access to the privileges of being a woman.

Through their stories of fantastical sex-change transformation, the creators of these “TG” narratives articulate a worldview mired in a contradiction: they are simultaneously aware that gender places harmful, arbitrary limitations on a person’s means of expression, but also cannot envision a world free from binary sex roles as they exist in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century West, and *also* believe that these binary sex roles are unbalanced in favour of women. This project argues that this contradiction arises as a result of two contrasting postfeminist discourses, and aims to analyse “TG” media with reference to existing literature on both, with the aim of better understanding the anxieties that underpin “TG” media.

Firstly, the reactionary, antifeminist politics of the Men's Rights Activist (MRA) movement, which sees men as disenfranchised and victimised by a new, pro-female social order. This is most overt in dedicated antifeminist texts, such as *The Myth of Male Power* (Farrell, 1993/1994), *Spreading Misandry* (Nathanson & Young, 2001) and *Save the Males* (Parker, 2008/2010), and has recently seen a surge in popularity online, with websites like *A Voice for Men* (<https://www.avoicemen.com/>) and *Return of Kings* (<http://www.returnofkings.com>). Central to this discourse, which will be discussed in far greater detail in Chapters 3 and 6, as well as the analysis in Chapters 7, 8 and 9, is the belief that patriarchy is the natural state of the world, with feminism and related social justice movements serving to unbalance a previously harmonious gender binary. Of importance to this project are the two standard Men's Rights claims that women now possess too much power and have begun oppressing men, and that the gendered expectations placed on men amount to a greater degree of oppression than the gendered expectations placed on women. While this project is in agreement with feminist and pro-feminist sociologists that men are harmed by patriarchy itself rather than women or a hypothetical "matriarchy", the influence of Men's Rights discourse on "TG" media cannot be ignored. What is notable about "TG" media is that, while Men's Rights discourses are often reproduced uncritically, only a single narrative in the corpus engages explicitly with feminism as a movement, and there is no suggestion that women's rights should be curtailed in the name of tradition. Rather, women in "TG" embody an antifeminist caricature of modern womanhood who is praised regardless of her choices and never faces any forms of structural oppression. Critical engagements with male feelings of anger and disrespect will also be factored in, including Raewyn Connell's *Masculinities* (1994/2005) and CJ Pascoe's *Dude, You're a Fag* (2007).



The second discourse is a postfeminist one, which presents women as having been successfully liberated from oppressive gender roles by the feminist gains of the 1970's and 1980's, emphasising women's newfound freedom and focusing on individual, rather than collective, emancipation. This discourse also emphasises women not rejecting "femininity", and instead consciously choosing to embrace it as one of these forms of personal empowerment, with some examples presenting it as a natural feature of female bodies. It is typified by nonfiction books like *Fire with Fire* (Wolf 1992/2003) and *Honey Money* (Hakim 2012), as well as pop-culture like the TV show *Ally McBeal* and the burlesque-influenced pop band The Pussycat Dolls. This discourse has been the subject of much criticism from within feminism, with recent examples being the books *Overloaded* (Whelehan 2000/2010) and *The Rise of Enlightened Sexism* (Douglas 2010). As will be demonstrated in Chapter 2, what differentiates "TG" media from mainstream fiction in which a male character is forced to adopt a female identity is that, rather than being constrained and humiliated by femininity, "TG" characters are instead empowered by it. As with the Men's Rights discourse, this will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 and 6, as well as throughout the process of analysis in Chapters 7, 8 and 9.

This project aims to critically analyse "TG" media with regard to these two discourses, arguing that it articulates anxieties around masculinity which come into being when the two discourses intersect. From the perspective of the Men's Rights discourse, the male characters in "TG" media occupy a subordinate position which greatly restricts their freedom of expression and makes unreasonable demands on their lives. From the perspective of the empowerment discourse, the female characters in "TG" media have

seemingly endless personal choices, and are effortlessly “natural” examples of extreme femininity, with their femininity functioning as a source of both pleasure and power. Given the vast amount of “TG” media available online, a broad content analysis methodology was chosen, with over five hundred “TG” media narratives coded for recurring themes in order to better understand how “TG” media engages with and reproduces these discourses.

This introductory chapter will later provide a history of the “TG” community, from the late 1990’s through to 2015, establishing key websites and creators, as well as demonstrating a gradual shift from “TG” websites archiving pieces of professional media to “TG” websites archiving original media made by and for the “TG” community. The second chapter, “The “TG” Genre”, will elaborate on this shift, demonstrating that the professional media archived by earlier “TG” websites ultimately failed to meet “TG” community’s expectations with regard to how such stories of sexual transformation “should” play out, leading to the creation of original media with its own genre conventions that distinguish it from the “mainstream”; the birth of the “TG” media this project is examining. The third chapter, “The Social Context of “TG””, will discuss postfeminist discourses around sex roles at the turn of the century, specifically the antifeminist discourse around the disempowerment of men and the empowerment of women, setting the stage for the project’s analysis of these themes in “TG” media. Before beginning the analysis, Chapter 4, “Research Design”, argues that a broad content analysis of a large “TG” media corpus is the best means to engage with “TG”, demonstrates how the corpus was created, and discusses the epistemological considerations made when approaching this potentially sensitive subject.

The project's corpus of over five hundred "TG" media texts is then discussed in Chapter 5, with broad observations about characters' sexes, gender identities and sexual orientations discussed, along with "TG" media's approach to sexual content. Using this data, the project argues that "TG" media has virtually no interest in the subjectivities of characters who are not heterosexual cisgender men, but is also too chaste to be written off as simply pornographic fantasies. Chapter 5 ends with the argument that what differentiates "TG" media from other media with similar subject matter is "TG" media's engagement with masculinity; a set of reactionary beliefs about the gendered, and naturally patriarchal, order of things. The project argues that, by strictly adhering to masculinity, "TG" media is able to simultaneously cross seemingly taboo boundaries while also remaining fundamentally reactionary. Re-reading the "TG" media corpus in light of the literature discussed in Chapter 3, the argument is made in Chapter 6 that the appeal of "TG" media is in what the project terms Social Inversion; the representation of a character's social experience transforming from negative to positive as they transform from male to female. The project argues that there are three broad categories of Social Inversion present in "TG" media: Rejected to Desired, Restrained to Free, and Ordinary to Supernatural, all of which reproduce differing postfeminist discourses around gender. The discussion of these three Social Inversions forms Chapters 7, 8 and 9, respectively. Each of these chapters begins with an accompanying review of additional literature relevant to the Social Inversion being discussed, and finishes with a short conclusion analysing the chapter's findings.

Chapter 7, "Rejected to Desired", discusses "TG" media narratives in which an unpopular or unwanted male character transforms into a woman who then becomes popular and accepted. The project argues that the depiction of these characters stems from

the belief that women by default receive preferential treatment both personally and institutionally, and that the expectations placed on women by patriarchy primarily benefit *women*, allowing them to manipulate men for their own ends. Chapter 8, “Restrained to Free”, discusses “TG” media narratives in which a male character who is frustrated, repressed or emotionally stunted transforms into a woman who is carefree, happy and fulfilled. The project argues that these narratives reproduce two reactionary discourses; the perennial claim that men’s labour is valuable while women’s labour is not labour at all, and the postfeminist claim that women are now free to engage in both traditionally male and female pursuits, while men are limited to only the traditionally male. Chapter 9, “Ordinary to Supernatural”, discusses “TG” narratives in which normal human men are transformed into inhuman women with supernatural powers. The project argues that these narratives engage with modern readings of “evil” female monsters – witches, vampires and succubi – as redemptive and emancipatory, but is ultimately concerned with using them as a means for male characters to indulge their desires.

The project concludes in Chapter 10, which synthesises the arguments made in chapters 7, 8 and 9. The ultimate argument made is that, while “TG” media is acutely aware of the harm done to men by the expectations and pressures of masculinity, its “solution” is deeply reactionary: Rather than challenge the limitations of masculinity, “TG” media protagonists simply take on femininity instead, and any problems they had are now resolved. This represents the cause of these anxieties not as the structure of masculinity itself, but as the individual characters who failed to embody it the “right” way. While the material itself has the potential to be emancipatory and transgressive, “TG” media remains wedded to masculinism.

## A Note on Pronouns and Terminology

Given that this project engages throughout with narratives in which a character's sex and gender are rendered mutable, and their understanding of themselves as male or female may shift throughout a narrative, the project has adopted the following conventions when referring to characters using pronouns:

Pre-transformation, characters will be identified with the gender-specific pronouns they themselves use. In most cases this will be he / him / his, as "TG" protagonists are overwhelmingly cisgender men. The handful of trans women protagonists are referred to using she / her / hers. Post-transformation, previously cisgender male character will be referred to with the gender-neutral pronoun them / they / theirs, while the small number of trans women whose bodies are altered to better fit their gender identity will continue to be referred to using she / her / hers.

Characters whose gender identity does not correspond to the sex they were assigned at birth are referred to as transgender. Characters whose gender identity corresponds to their assigned sex are referred to as cisgender. Cisgender characters who, for reasons other than gender identity (such as engaging in a deception by disguising themselves), alter their dress and behaviour to conform to the "opposite" gender will be referred to as cross-dressing. When discussing work that engages more broadly with the subject of characters

who cross the boundaries of gender and destabilise fixed ideas of male and female, the term trans\* will be used.

## The History of “TG” Media, 1997 to 2015

The remainder of this introductory chapter will provide a broad history of the “TG” community, beginning in 1997 and carrying through to 2015, the year in which this project ceased sampling “TG” media. 1997 was chosen as a starting year because it is the earliest archived example of sex-change transformation visual media being collected on a publicly accessible website, *Transformation Graphics Archive* (<http://tga.transform.to/><sup>2</sup>), which will be the first object of discussion.

The earliest dedicated online archive of “TG” media was the now-defunct website *Transformation Graphics Archive*, a partial cache of which can still be accessed via the archival website *Wayback Machine* (<http://archive.org/web>). Operating between 1997 and

*Figure 1 is unable to be reproduced online. Figure can be viewed at:*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20010612084540/>

<http://tga.transform.to:80/tg/hyde2.jpg>

*Figure 1. A still from one of the transformation sequences in Dr. Jekyll and Ms. Hyde, hosted on Transformation Graphics Archive (“HYDE2”, 2001).*

2001, *Transformation Graphics Archive*, as its name suggests, was an archive of visual media depicting transformations, which were organised into broad categories based on the nature of the transformation depicted, with one category referred to as “Trans-Gender”.

The most recently archived version of the

“Trans-Gender” page of *Transformation Graphics Archive* (“Trans-Gender”, 2001) hosted sixty-eight static images taken from a variety of both amateur and professional sources, all of which depict a male character transforming, via means such as magic and alien

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<sup>1</sup>Inactive URL, archive available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20010720154716/http://tga.transform.to:80/>

<sup>2</sup>Inactive URL, archive available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20010720154716/http://tga.transform.to:80/>

experimentation, into a female one. The websites which appeared in the wake of *Transformation Graphics Archive* continued to refer to this material as “transgender”, and later as “TG”, solidifying it as the genre’s name.

Professional material in the archive’s “Trans-Gender” section took the form of digital copies of print material, some of which has been digitally colourised if the original image was greyscale. These include a page from the erotic comic *Xxxenophile*, in which a male

warrior is transformed into a woman in order to join an all-female cult; the cover of the children’s book *Help! I’m Trapped In My Sister’s Body*; a single panel from the martial arts comedy manga *Ranma 1/2*, in which the main character transforms from a young man to a young woman; and a comic from *Mad Magazine* in which a young boy becomes an adult woman due to the hormones in cow milk. There are also stills from the comedy movie *Dr. Jekyll & Ms. Hyde*, in which a meek male scientist transforms himself in a sexually aggressive woman; jokes about sex changes from *Playboy* magazine; and collected pages and covers from comic publisher Image Comics’ “Babewatch” event, in which their male superheroes were temporarily transformed into women by a villainess with a vendetta against men.

*Figure 2 is unable to be reproduced online. Figure can be viewed at:*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20010820112520/>

<http://tga.transform.to:80/tg/nan.jpg>

*Figure 2. A panel from the comic *Ranma ½* with colour added, hosted on *Transformation Graphics Archive* (“NAN.JPG”, 2001).*



Other images hosted in the 'Trans-Gender' category were amateur works created specifically for online consumption. Of these original creations, only one depicts a plausible transgender scenario, which is to say that there is no recourse to magic or science fiction to explain the changes made to the character's body. This comic, which has no title,

("petula.jpg", 2001), tells the story of a man, Peter, who 'was such a handfull [sic] for his over worked mother' that she puts him on an 'an intensive course of girly hormones' and performs 'alterations', here depicted as the inversion of Peter's penis, in order to turn him into a 'blond bombshell' who is subsequently

*Figure 3 is unable to be reproduced online. Figure can be viewed at:*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20010612085248/>

<http://tga.transform.to:80/tg/petula.jpg>

*Figure 3. An original cartoon by Paul Pichette, hosted on Transformation Graphics Archive. (Pichette, 2001a).*

humiliated and spanked by Peter's girlfriend. The other amateur works created for the archive take the form of, for example, a drawing of a woman in a Playboy Bunny costume lamenting 'You changed me into a girl, you made me miss my interview. And you turned my only good suit into a BUNNY COSTUME!!' (Pichette, 2001a). Another depicts a man who has been abducted by aliens, then transformed into a woman and impregnated as part of an experiment (Mako, 2001a), while another depicts a group of male scientists transformed into women due to a faulty 'dimensional scanner' (Pichette, 2001b).

The three most frequently credited contributors of this original art were Paul Pichette, Craig Wenhurst, and "Mako", all of whom continue to play important roles in the "TG" media community. Pichette and Wenhurst no longer contribute original "TG" media, but instead work together to maintain the website *Metamorphose.org* (<http://www.metamorphose.org>), a searchable catalogue of transformations in both

mainstream and niche media. Other examples of this approach, in which the focus is on the archiving of male-to-female transformation media created elsewhere, included *TG Graphics and Fiction Archive* (<http://www.tgfa.org/>), still online and maintained by Jenny North, though with only one update between 2002 and 2016; *Transgender Sci-Fi*, no longer online or archived; *Darkwoman's Transgendered Media* (<http://www25.brinkster.com/tgcg/darkwoman.htm><sup>3</sup>), available only in archived form; and *Farhad's TG Anime and Manga Page* (<http://tgmanga.free.fr/index2.htm>), which specialises in scans of Japanese comics with a male-to-female transformation element, and is still online, though it has not been updated since 2007. While this string of abandoned sites might suggest that “TG” came and went, the remainder of this introduction will demonstrate that, rather than dying off, the “TG” community shifted its focus from archiving existing professional work to creating its own original “TG” media; the focus of this project.

Of *Transformation Graphics Archive's* three major contributors, Mako is by far the most prolific in the world of original “TG” media. The original material by Mako which was archived on *Transformation Graphics Archive* is credited solely to Mako, and mostly takes the form of image sequences in which a photograph of a male subject gradually metamorphoses into a photograph of a female subject, with descriptions stating that this is because the subject is a “werewoman” (Mako, 2001b). However, since becoming a more active content creator, Mako has mostly worked collaboratively, as a writer and occasionally a film director. While working solo on the ongoing narrative “TG” comic *Touched by the Hand of God* (Mako, 2010a), in which an uptight white-collar man becomes a violent,

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<sup>3</sup> Inactive URL, archive available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20011215180205/http://www25.brinkster.com:80/tgcg/darkwoman.htm>

sexually provocative female vampire, Mako has collaborated with artist Blackshirtboy on nine “TG” image sequences, with artist Mr-DNA on the shorter narrative “TG” comic *The Fall of Camelot* (Mako & Mr-DNA, 2011). However, their most significant output has been a series of live action “TG” movies, in which Mako writes, directs, scores and occasionally acts. The shorts *The Kiss* (Mako, 2004/2012a), *The Last Piece Standing* (Mako 2005/2013), *Eleven*

*Figure 4 is unable to be reproduced online. Source movie can be viewed at:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2XsEvcwMFc>

*Figure 4. A still from the “TG” thriller *The Black Rabbit*, written, directed by and starring Mako (Mako, 2007/2017).*

(Mako, 2006) and *The Black Rabbit* (Mako, 2007/2017) were originally distributed as paid-for digital downloads through Mako’s *Siren Tales* website (<http://www.sirentales.com/><sup>4</sup>), though the *Siren Tales* domain has since been

purchased by another company, and the films can only be acquired through Mako’s *YouTube* channel (<https://www.youtube.com/user/MakoDap>). Mako also wrote and directed the feature-length “TG” movie *Paradox Alice* (Dapkewicz, 2013), which was picked up by professional distributors and released on DVD in Taiwan and Japan, and is also available digitally on Microsoft’s X-Box Live Movies and Amazon’s Amazon Video streaming services. Mako presented as a man named Eric until 2016, after which she has identified as a woman and ceased producing “TG” media, focusing instead on podcasting.

While Mako’s films, particularly the feature-length *Paradox Alice*, with its CGI effects and cast of professional actors, represent “TG” media at its most ambitious, the two most common forms taken by visual media created by the “TG” community are comics and what

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<sup>4</sup> Inactive URL, archive available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20020326105628/http://www.sirentales.com/>

are called “TG Captions”, sometimes shortened to “TG Caps”. A “TG Caption” is created by taking an existing image of a woman, often from fashion shoots or pornography, and adding a text caption to it which recontextualises the image as part of a “TG” narrative. Two such images appear in *Transformation Graphics Archive*. One is a photograph of a woman holding a wine glass with one hand and removing her shirt with the other, exposing one of her breasts. In the top right-hand corner, the following text has been added: ‘After taking a drink from the wine, Bill was suddenly overcome with a strange sensation as his body began to change....’ (“tg\_pic1.jpg”, 2001). The second “TG Caption”, is a photograph of fashion model Cindy Crawford, one hand posed so that she appears to be tugging on her left ear. A text caption then tells the story of a man named Jack who is trying to remove an enchanted Cindy Crawford mask which is slowly transforming his body into her duplicate (Robo, 2001).

The ease with which “TG Captions” can be created and distributed makes them a highly popular form of media, with the “TG” media directory *World of TG* listing over eighty ‘non-adult’ “TG Caption” sites and over two hundred and fifty ‘adult’ “TG Caption” sites hosted on Google’s Blogspot platform alone, with a further sixty listed as being hosted on

*Figure 5 is unable to be reproduced online. Figure can be viewed at:*  
<https://nobras.deviantart.com/art/Winner-of-the-day-TG-Caption-412291571>

*Figure 5. An image of a woman at the beach becomes a “TG Caption” set in the Bikini Beach universe with the addition of a text caption (kinotabi1981, 2013).*

art-sharing platform DeviantArt. Some are simply “TG Captions” of the sort posted on *Transformation Graphics Archive*, while others have a specific theme to them. *Magic Taxi TG Caption Archive* (<http://magictaxi.blogspot.com>), for example, has all its “TG Captions” revolve

around a taxi that causes its passengers to exchange bodies with each other, and thus uses photographs of women hailing or stepping out of taxis as its source of images. Likewise, “TG

Captions” set in the shared “Bikini Beach” universe revolve around a private beach which men can only attend if they transform themselves into women, and draws on images of women in swimwear, while the “Altered Fates” captions feature a cursed medallion which transforms its wearer into the owner of the next piece of clothing the touch, and so draws on images of female fashion models that highlight a certain article of clothing.

The corpus of this project, however, does not include these “TG Captions” as, while certainly worthy of analysis, they are notoriously ephemeral. As the images used as the captions’ bases are almost never the work of the “TG Caption” creators themselves, it is common for “TG Caption” websites to be taken down as a result of copyright claims by the owners of the images used – for example, every single “TG Caption” uploaded to the blog *Magic TG Captions Archive* (<http://magictgcaptions.blogspot.com>) prior to May of 2016 has been removed from the server, with all hyperlinks leading to blank pages. The project is also not concerned with “TG” prose fiction, as this has its own distinct history which grew around the website *FictionMania* (<https://fictionmania.tv/>) and places a greater emphasis on erotic cross-dressing and more grounded, less fantastical narratives. What this project is concerned with is another outgrowth of “TG” media; the narrative “TG Comic”.

“TG”-themed comics are, while not as prevalent as “TG Captions”, of more interest as an object of study because they are both more permanent (being wholly original works and thus not subject to copyright disputes), and their narratives are substantially more complex than the single paragraph of text most “TG Captions” consist of. Some of the “TG” images hosted in *Transformation Graphics Archive* are comics, such as the aforementioned

petula.jpg, but they are only a page in length, and present self-contained stories. Following the 2001 demise of *Transformation Graphics Archive*, however, the “TG” comics being

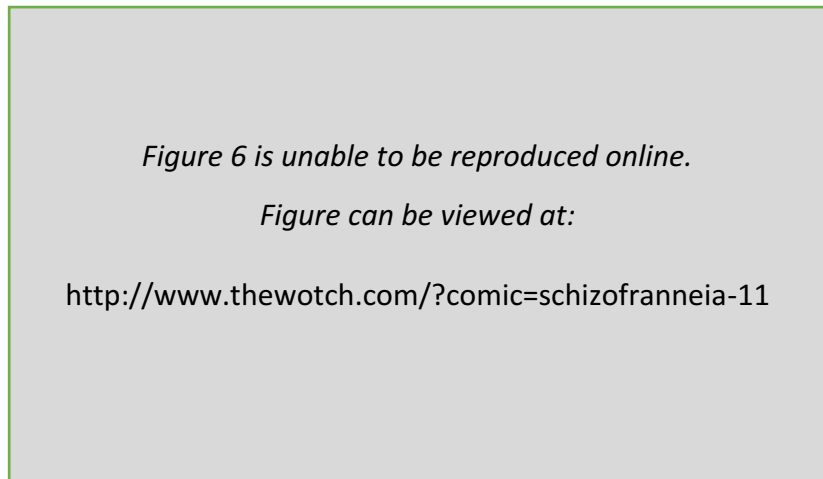


Figure 6. Detail from *The Watch* in which a middle-aged white man becomes a teenage girl of non-specifically “Asian” origin (Onymous & Ericson 2003c, p. 11).

produced grew longer and more complex, occasionally producing serialised narratives that ran for years at a time. The first, and most successful, of these is *The Watch* (Onymous & Ericson, 2002a), which began in 2002 and is still updating to this day, albeit sporadically. Exploring the serialised adventures of a group of contemporary American teenagers, most of which contain strong “TG” elements, *The Watch* was, in the late 2000’s, popular enough to generate over \$2000 US a month in donations from its readers (“Donation Bar Archives”, 2008). Other online comics followed this pattern of focusing on young adult men who transform into women, with mixed success. *Abstract Gender* (Shikama, 2005) also focused on two male teenagers who underwent “TG” transformations; the collaborative comic *Troop 37* (Egnaro & Sight, 2007), no longer updated, focused on a ten year old boy who becomes a 16 year old girl; *I Dream of a Jeannie Bottle* (Rudd, 2009) is about a male slacker who becomes an all-powerful female genie; *Murry And Lewy* (Brown & Revor, 2010) is about two

bachelors who are cursed to become women; and with time *The Watch* would eventually receive its own spin-off comic, *Cheer!* (Tselsebar, 2003), focusing on the adventures of a group of school bullies who are permanently transformed into cheerleaders as punishment for their behaviour. *Cheer* is currently hosted on the server of the “TG” comic *SailorSun* (Rudd, 2006), the main character of which was transformed into a woman after being shot with a “TG Gun”. “TG” video games have also been produced, with almost one thousand free amateur “TG” games available on the website *TF GamesSite.com* (<https://www.tfgamesite.com/>), while a crowdfunding campaign for the more ambitious “TG” game *Gender Bender DNA Twister Extreme* (Transcendent Games, 2014) raised over five times its funding goal in donations from “TG” fans, with five individuals donating \$2500 Canadian dollars each in order to have themselves appear as characters in the game (“Gender Bender DNA Twister Extreme”, 2015).

As well as ongoing narrative comics, the website *TG Comics (and Stories)* ([www.tgcomics.com](http://www.tgcomics.com)) was launched by “TG” media creator Femur as a place to archive self-contained original work. *TG Comics (and Stories)* currently hosts comics from fifty-five artists, all of which deal with “TG” themes in some way. The comics are mostly free, though *TG Comics (and Stories)* also features what it refers to as ‘Premium’ comics, which users must pay to access. The comics hosted range in length from a few pages to several hundred, represent a mixture of traditional 2D art, digital 2D art, and 3D modelling, and have their level of sexual content graded between ‘TGC-C’ for the mildest, and ‘TGC-X’ for the most explicit. *TG Comics (and Stories)* will be the major source of “TG” material for this project, and makes for a useful comparison with *Transformation Graphics Archive* in order to see how far the “TG” community has developed. Aside from *TG Comics (and Stories)*, new “TG”

media is also regularly produced and shared on the artist website *DeviantArt* (<http://www.deviantart.com/>), with users curating virtual galleries of original “TG” media, such as *The-TG-Society* (<https://the-tg-society.deviantart.com/>), *Worldoftg-Group* (<https://worldoftg-group.deviantart.com/>), *Turn-Into-A-Girl* (<https://turn-into-a-girl.deviantart.com/>) and *TG-Galaxy* (<https://tg-galaxy.deviantart.com/>), which continue to be updated regularly. While “TG” began as small archives of excerpts from professional work, it is now focused on large archives of original work.

Having established that dedicated archives of original “TG” media exist, and that new, original “TG” media is being produced regularly, the next step is to define what, precisely, makes media qualify as being “TG”. The following chapter will work to establish that “TG” should be considered its own genre with its own conventions and audience expectations, and that these traits are distinct from – and often opposed to – those of more “mainstream” narratives that use magical sex-change transformations as a plot device.



## 2. THE “TG” GENRE

The aim of this chapter is to establish that “TG” is something distinct from simply “fantastical narratives in which a character changes sex”, and is a relatively recent development, with its formation beginning in the late 1990’s and having its tropes and conventions first codified by the mid-2000’s. This project is concerned with “TG” media produced prior to and including 2015. More “TG” media has been produced from 2016 onward, and the output remains steady.

The chapter will begin with a review of sex-change transformations as they appear in popular visual media, as these were the sources the early “TG” community drew from, as discussed above. After establishing the breadth and variety of sex-change transformations found in visual media, the question will be asked: If these transformations are so common, why should “TG” be considered a distinct genre? Why not simply consider sex-change transformations a plot device which can feature in multiple genres? The question will then be answered by looking at audience discourses around “TG”, using the popular websites *TV Tropes* and *Metamorphose.org*, and demonstrating that much of this popular media is criticised for *failing* to include expected “TG” conventions, but that such conventions are offered by original web media produced by and for the “TG” community.

## 'I Can Look at Myself Naked!': Minor and Non-Narrative Sex-Change Transformations in Visual Media

This section, and the one which follows, will provide a broad overview of sex-change transformations which appear in popular visual media. The focus on specifically visual media is deliberate, given that this project is concerned with “TG” visual media, rather than prose. Such an overview is necessary, given that this chapter will frequently refer to this material, both in the context of discussing the “TG” audience’s relationship with it, and in the context of comparisons with “TG” media.

The term “Sex-Change Transformation” has been chosen here to distinguish the changes of sex discussed in this section. These are not attempts to accurately depict a person’s social or medical transition, but rather transformations in which, via an overtly unrealistic method such as magic or advanced fictional technology, a character’s body is either entirely transformed, or exchanged for the body of another person of the other sex. This section will also briefly discuss characters who have been “reimagined” by their fans as being the opposite sex; in such cases, this is simply an alternate character interpretation, and does not feature an associated transformation narrative to explain the character’s change of sex. The section will begin by discussing this non-narrative media, then discuss what the project is calling “minor” examples of sex-change transformations. These “minor” transformations do not play a significant role in a story’s narrative and the ramifications for the transformed character are not explored, functioning simply as jokes, self-contained scenes, or running gags. “Major” transformations which do play a significant role, and are

more relevant to the project's focus on Social Inversion, will be discussed in the following section.

Fandoms "reimagining" an established character as the opposite sex is a common enough pursuit, particularly online, to have spawned its own associated fan terminology; "Rule 63" and "Crossplay". The term Rule 63 is well-known enough that definitions and explanations of it exist on the internet cultural encyclopedias *Urban Dictionary* (InternetHateMachine 2007), *Know Your Meme* ("Rule 63", 2007) and *TV Tropes* ("Rule 63", 2017), as well as a dedicated gallery on *DeviantArt* ("Rule63: swapping genders since 2010", 2010). Rule 63, presented as one of many satirical "Rules of the Internet" ("Rules of the Internet", 2006), states that, for every fictional character that exists, their associated fandom has created an alternate version who is the opposite sex. While the blanket statement that this applies to *every* fictional character is intended, as with all "Rules of the Internet", to be a piece of comedic hyperbole, it is still extremely common for characters to be reimagined in this way. Searching the popular online art platform *DeviantArt* for "Rule 63" artwork yields, as of writing, 24,214 results, depicting opposite sex versions of characters from popular media such as *Dragonball Z*, *Doctor Who* and *Captain America*, while a 2016 article on the fan culture website *Dorkly* lists "40 Genderbent Masterpieces That'll Make You Glad 'Rule 63' Exists" (Young, 2016), featuring fan artwork of opposite sex versions of characters from popular franchises such as *Super Mario Brothers*, *Lord of the Rings* and *Star Trek*.

"Crossplay" is portmanteau of "Cosplay", the fan practice of dressing as characters from the media the fandom is built around (itself a portmanteau of "Costume Play"), and

“Cross-Dressing”. When a fan crossplays, they cosplay as a character who is of the opposite sex to them, often with alterations made to the character’s costume to give them a more masculine or feminine appearance, or for the sake of modesty. Like Rule 63, Crossplay is the subject of articles on internet culture websites, such as *Broadly* (Tourjée, 2016) *The Escapist* (Kerzner, 2015) and *The Conversation* (King 2015), an entry in *Wikipedia* (“Crossplay”, 2017), and dedicated discussion forums on the websites *Cosplay.com* and *Reddit*. Discussions of Crossplay and Rule 63 overlap, with the *Broadly* article cited earlier conflating the two terms, many of the artworks on *DeviantArt* categorising themselves as both “Rule 63” and “Crossplay”. As this project is concerned with “TG” media because of its narratives, Rule 63 and Crossplay media are not directly relevant, though it is sometimes appropriated – for example, crossplays of the male superheroes Batman and Iron Man are used as the basis of “TG” captions on the blog *The Caption Corps*, with the blog’s author noting that the ease with which crossplay images are found makes the creation of superhero “TG” captions much simpler (The Captain, 2014).

Other media uses sex-change transformations as a minor plot element; while not the focus of the story, these transformations still play a role, even if – as many do – the transformations only last for one scene. These will now be discussed, firstly with reference to the use of transformation as a comedic device, and secondly with reference to transformation being used to deceive and seduce. The gendered implications of both will be discussed in the literature review.

The film *Scooby Doo* (Gosnell, 2002) features a scene in which a male character briefly exchanges bodies with a woman he is attracted to and announces ‘Hey, I can look at

myself naked!', while the sequel, *Scooby Doo 2: Monsters Unleashed* (Gosnell, 2004) has a male character briefly become female while testing the effects of magic potions, accompanied by a comedic scream at his reflection. A similar comedic use of sex-change transformations occurs in the low-budget science fiction comedy *Repligator* (McCormick, 1996), in which a military teleporter has the side effect of transforming the male soldiers who use it into beautiful women who can only think about sex. 'I hate to break the news to you, but the military establishment doesn't really have a use for an assault force made up of genetically altered women with large breasts!', snaps a furious army colonel, to which the teleporter's creator replies 'Are you kidding? The invasion of Normandy would've been a snap!'. The contrast between a male killing machine and a female sex object is also played for laughs in *Critters 2* (Garris, 1988), in which a faceless "male" alien bounty hunter disguises "himself" on Earth by copying the form of the first human "he" sees, which happens to be the female centrefold model in a pornographic magazine. The film *Stardust* (Vaughn, 2007) also depicts a male / female contrast humorously, with a filthy, awkward male peasant magically transformed into a beautiful, buxom bar maid in a low-cut dress and corset, while retaining their male voice and mannerisms.

As discussed during the earlier section on early "TG" websites, publisher Image Comics ran an event called "Babewatch" in which their male superheroes were all transformed into women for one issue of their respective comics. This, too, was handled humorously, with the now-female cast of *Youngblood* depicted muttering 'My back is killing me', 'I think I've got to pee', and 'Kind of a turn-on' among themselves (Stephenson & Nauck, 1995). A similar fate befell the eponymous protagonist of *Guy Gardner: Warrior* when he was temporarily transformed into a woman by the villainous Dementor, who then

forced “Gal” Gardner to pose for him in a series of revealing outfits, with Guy’s embarrassment played for laughs (Smith & Campos, 1996). The character of Man-Eater Lad from the comic *Legionaries* was also temporarily transformed into a woman and humiliated after contracting ‘Grandin Gender Reversal Disease’ (Bierbaum, Bierbaum & Fosco, 1994), while Courier, a supporting character from *X-Men*, and Konrad, a supporting character from *Elektra*, were both permanently transformed from male to female, with sub-plots focusing on their discomfort at being ‘in the sex war – caught behind enemy lines!’ (Milligan & Deodato Jr, 1997). The *Dungeons & Dragons* parody comic *Nodwick* temporarily transformed the macho warrior Yeager into a woman in the comic “Little Tomb of Horrors” and mockingly called them ‘Xena’ (Williams, 1999), while the *Dungeons & Dragons* PC game *Baldur’s Gate II* (BioWare, 2000) had Edwin, an arrogant male wizard, temporarily transformed into a woman and subjected to unwanted male attention, much to the amusement of the other characters. As will be discussed in the literature view, the use of forcing femininity upon a male character as a form of humiliation is common in fiction dealing with cross-dressing, and here serves a similar purpose, albeit with a complete physical transformation. The fantasy video game *Faria* (Game Arts, 1989) also features a sex-change transformation, although presented in a bizarre, almost non-sequitur sequence. Approaching the game’s denouement, it is revealed that the game’s female protagonist is, in fact, a prince who was transformed into a woman by a wizard, and must regain their true form before the story’s end; as the protagonist of *Faria* never speaks, it is unclear what effect this has on them, although it does allow them to marry a princess they had earlier rescued while female. Another video game, the cyberpunk *Burn:Cycle* (Trip Media, 1994), also ends on a comedic, non-sequitur sex-change transformation, with its protagonist

escaping from his nemesis by transferring his consciousness into an empty female body, musing that it's 'not a bad model' and wondering what it would look like with a tan.

Aside from comedy, another use for minor sex-change transformations is seduction and deception: a male character, usually the antagonist, is transformed into an alluring female in order to seduce another character where brute force or threats would have failed, taking advantage of their vulnerability while aroused. The antagonist of the fantasy film *Deathstalker* (Watson, 1983) transforms one of his male underlings into a duplicate of the protagonist's love interest in order to seduce and kill him. The trio of invading aliens from *Vampire Vixens from Venus* (Bohus, 1995) try a similar approach, morphing from grotesque male aliens into beautiful women in order to seduce men and drain their energy. A more condensed variation occurs in *The Matrix* (Wackowski & Wackowski, 1999), in which the protagonist is distracted by an attractive woman walking by and lets his guard down, only for the woman to immediately be revealed as a shape-shifting male villain in disguise. This transformation tactic is also used by the male villains of *Leprechaun IV: In Space* (Trenchard-Smith, 1996), *Ghoulies* (Bercovici, 1984), *Bones* (Dickerson 2001), *Beyond Bedlam* (Jean, 1994) and *Demonic Toys* (Manoogian, 1992). Other films deal with body-hopping consciousnesses that are identified as male, but possess women's bodies explicitly for the purpose of seduction: *Amityville 3-D* (Fleischer 1983), *Blackwater Valley Exorcism* (Wiley, 2006), and *Catacombs* (Schmoeller, 1988). Ostensibly "heroic" takes on this trope also exist. The eponymous hero of the manga and anime series *Naruto* (Kishimoto, 1999) is a ninja who has mastered an ability called "Orioke no Jutsu" ("Sexy Technique"), which allows him to transform briefly into a buxom, nude woman, confounding and distracting his male opponents. Likewise, the fantasy parody comic *Groo* has its incarcerated heroes launch a

jailbreak by transforming the other prisoners (all men) into beautiful women so that the guards are tempted to open the cell doors – however, they are not changed back after the heroes’ escape, leaving them in an implied rape scenario as a lecherous guard states he has ‘a few suggestions...’ about what to do with them (Aragonés, n.d). These transformations engage with two patriarchal assumptions which will be further discussed Chapter 3. Firstly, that trans\* people are engaged purely in an act of deception, aiming to obscure their “real” sex for their own purposes. Secondly, that female sexuality exists to entrap and manipulate heterosexual men. The prevalence of this trope in horror and fantasy stories is also discussed in Chapter 9, with reference to the representation of the female body as inherently “unnatural” and unstable.

## ‘Being a Woman had its Advantages’: Major Sex-Change Transformations in Visual Media

Having now discussed non-narrative and “minor” sex-change transformations, this section will cover popular media which features “major” sex-change transformations; transformation which form the backbone of their respective narratives, or at least have their ramifications explored in depth.

A male-to-female sex-change transformation forms the premise of the popular and long-running manga *Ranma ½* (Takahashi, 1987), the story of which has been adapted into an animated TV series and several films, both animated and live action. A hybrid of martial arts and romantic farce, the protagonist of *Ranma ½* is Ranma, young male martial artist



who is cursed to transform into a girl every time he is splashed with cold water, with warm water reversing the change. Ranma is betrothed to a girl called Akane, but the nature of his curse and the story's comedic tone ensure Ranma's changing sex complicates their relationship at the worst possible times. The anime series *Kampf* (Nomad, 2009) takes similar material and treats it in a far more exploitative way, with its protagonist, Natsuru, transforming from a teenage boy into a voluptuous woman with super powers called a "Kampfer" in order to fight against other, rival Kampfers. While *Kampf* does play with its protagonist's dual identity in a similar fashion to *Ranma ½*, it is more concerned with showing off the Kampfers' bodies for the purposes of titillation than exploring the premise's ramifications, with lengthy scenes dedicated to the characters undressing, bathing, and groping each other. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the Australian-Canadian children's animated series *SheZow* (SheZow Productions, 2012) is about Guy, a preteen boy who inherits the powers of a female superhero called SheZow, along with her highly feminine costume (pink, with a skirt and high heels) and gadgets (super-powered lipstick, vanishing cream and hairspray). This is, however, just a change of costume, not a physical transformation – as the theme song makes clear, 'He'll save the world / dressed like a girl' – though the series still plays Guy's emasculating dual identity for laughs, with Guy simultaneously happy with his new super powers, but unhappy with their feminine aesthetics.

Some transformations are depicted as a form of supernatural justice, in which a man who treats women poorly is transformed into a woman in order to experience what they have put women through. This is the premise of the short films *Soowitch* (Rivard, 2001), in which a man who uses women for sex switches bodies with his latest one-night stand, and

*Turntables* (Medick & Baldonado, 2000), in which a sexist DJ is transformed into a woman by the goddess Artemis and is ultimately raped while drunk. It is also dealt with in the three feature-length films *Goodbye Charlie* (Minelli, 1964), *Cleo/Leo* (Vincent, 1989) and *Switch* (Edwards, 1991). In *Goodbye Charlie*, a womanising wannabe screenwriter, Charlie, is killed by a jealous husband and then reincarnated as the kind of woman he lusted after. Although this is intended as punishment, Charlie begins to enjoy the experience, admiring their new body ('I don't have to go see Brigitte Bardot movies anymore. All I have to do is come home and pull down the shades') and finding pleasure in wearing dresses and getting their hair done. However, Charlie ultimately loses control of the situation, becoming an object of lust for a rich playboy much like their earlier male self, and is killed once again, only be reincarnated as a dog. *Cleo/Leo* follows a similar structure. Leo, a misogynist businessman who hires women based on their breast size, is shot and killed by an enraged feminist, only to be returned to life as a woman. Using their business knowledge, "Cleo" is hired by Leo's old company and gradually takes it over, removing Leo's equally misogynist replacement in the process. When given the chance to become male again, however, Cleo steadfastly refuses – without access to Leo's money and power, Cleo was forced to learn empathy, and cultivated a circle of supportive friends that Leo never had. Life as Cleo is simply more complete and fulfilling, so why "fix" things? This narrative trope appears frequently in "TG" media, and is the subject of Chapter 8.

*Switch* also features a rich male playboy, Steve, who is killed and reincarnated as a woman, but this time with an ultimatum: Steve must find a woman who truly loves them, and this will decide whether their soul goes to Heaven or Hell. Reinvented as a woman called Amanda, they become pregnant after one of Steve's male friends rapes them while

drunk, and proceed to marry the friend and keep the child. Amanda dies during childbirth, but in sacrificing themselves to bring new life into the world, their soul is redeemed by the love of their new daughter. It is Amanda, rather than Steve, who ultimately goes to Heaven, stating 'I really liked being a man, but being a woman had its advantages'.

Even when the transformation is not intended as a piece of karmic justice, male characters are still depicted as growing into more complete people as a result of being transformed into a woman; a trope which will recur throughout "TG" media. The premise of the dystopian science fiction film *Memory Run* (Goldstein, 1995) is that its typical tough guy action lead, Andre, has his mind transferred into the dead body of his former lover, Celeste, by the film's antagonist. Andre escapes and joins an underground resistance movement, and begins to long for a life without fighting. When the antagonist successfully transfers his own consciousness into Andre's original body, Andre ultimately chooses to kill him, permanently trapping Andre in Celeste's body. Celeste's body is then revealed to be pregnant with Andre's child, and Andre marries a male resistance member, escaping the conflict and becoming a happy wife and mother. The superhero comic *Mantra* uses a similar premise. *Mantra's* protagonist is an immortal knight called Lukasz, who has fought evil for over a thousand years through a process of constant reincarnation upon death. All Lukasz's prior bodies have been male, but circumstances in the debut issue cause Lukasz to be reincarnated in the body of a young single mother, Eden, and removes Lukasz's reincarnation powers, meaning death as Eden will be permanent. Now known as "Mantra", they must unlearn Lukasz's role as a violent loner to become a mother to Eden's children, and put aside Lukasz's physical strength in favour of Eden's latent magical powers. At the end of Issue 20, Mantra reflects on having achieved balance, becoming a composite of the best aspects of

Lukasz and Eden: 'My name is Lukasz, I'm a warrior. My name is Mantra, I'm a wizard. My name is Eden... I'm a woman' (Barr & Hor, 1995).

While this project is not focused on prose fiction, there will now be a brief overview of the fantasy novel *Dragonsword* (Baudino, 1988). *Dragonsword* is notable in that its depiction of a male-to-female transformation as a negative experience will be relevant later, when discussing fan reviews on the website *Metamorphose.org*, and also when discussing the uniformly positive portrayal of male-to-female transformation in "TG" media. Set in a violently patriarchal medieval kingdom called Grylth, much of *Dragonsword's* supporting cast are a troop of male knights who, approximately half way through the book, are transformed into women by a wizard from a rival kingdom, who hopes that this will break the Grylth's morale and cause them to surrender without a fight. Unlike media which plays transformations for comedy, embarrassment, or deception, the treatment of the transformations in *Dragonsword*, and the psychological and social effects on the characters, is deadly serious:

It was as Santhe had said: they were all women. One of them mounted and road toward the king. Only the armour and escutcheon indicated this was Marrget, the captain. The burly warrior had become a thin young woman with ash-blond hair and a sense of fragility about her. There was a haunted, horrified leanness to her face, and she bore her body like a fresh scar. (Baudino, 1988, p. 242-243)

Forced to navigate Grylth's society as women, the transformed characters find themselves subject to threats, curfews and sexual violence, with some choosing to commit

suicide rather than live as women under patriarchy. However, the transformation of Gryllth's knights ultimately leads to the kingdom becoming more egalitarian: Forced to choose between surrender and sending its now-female knights back into battle, Gryllth chooses the latter, causing the kingdom's gendered division of labour to begin unravelling. While the surviving transformed knights end the novel at peace with being women, this is only because their society itself has been actively altered to accommodate new ways of being a woman. This is in contrast to previous examples, such as *Switch*, in which the transformed character adapts to an existing way of being a woman, and their attempts to "act like a man" are played for laughs.

This belief in male and female social roles existing in a harmonious balance is reinforced in the three films *Turnabout* (Roach, 1940), *Dating the Enemy* (Huberman, 1996) and *It's A Boy Girl Thing* (Hurren, 2005). All three present slightly different takes on the same basic story: A feuding heterosexual couple in a long-term relationship have a lengthy argument over which one has the harder life, then somehow switch bodies and must now contend with living each other's lives; something revealed to be far harder than they had anticipated. Given the 62 year gap in between *Turnabout* and *It's A Boy Girl Thing*, there are notable differences in the portrayals – *Turnabout's* couple are a working man and his stay at home wife, *Dating the Enemy's* couple are unmarried and both work full time, and *It's A Boy Girl Thing's* couple are childhood friends who do not admit their romantic feelings until the final scene – but all three films ultimately end with the couple admitting that they misjudged each other, reconciling, and then returning to their original bodies with a new appreciation of their partner. Here, masculinity and femininity are not represented as a

power imbalance, but as two equal, complementary halves that must be taught to respect the role of the other.

A similar take on masculinity and femininity being complementary is presented in a much more unconventional way by the film *Zerophilia* (Curland, 2005). *Zerophilia* tells the story of Luke, a boy in his late teens who discovers he possesses an extremely rare “Z” chromosome which causes him to change sex after orgasm, becoming “Luka”. His condition will eventually stabilise after puberty, however, and Luke must decide whether to remain male or become female. Ultimately, Luke discovers that, as long as he orgasms while having sex with another “Z” chromosome carrier, his condition will never stabilise, and enters a sexual relationship with Michelle, whose “Z” chromosome causes her to become a boy called Max. The film ends with a montage of them happily having sex, switching between Luke & Michelle and Luka & Max after every orgasm. While the relationship is certainly less rigidly heteronormative than the ones discussed above, the possibility of sex or romance between Luka and Michelle, or Luke and Max, is never broached, and Luke’s friend even makes a point of explicitly reminding other characters – and, by extension, the audience – that, despite his condition, Luke is ‘not queer’.

There are two feature-length films which add a sex-change transformation aspect to Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. These are the horror film *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde* (Baker, 1971) and the science fiction comedy *Dr. Jekyll and Ms. Hyde* (Price, 1995). In *Dr. Jekyll & Sister Hyde*, Jekyll experiments with ways to reverse the ageing process, and believes the key lies specifically in female blood, which he acquires from the female victims of murderers he agrees to work with: ‘What is it that gives a

woman's skin that silken texture? Why does she keep her hair when so many men lose theirs? Hormones! Female hormones!'. Jekyll's experiments cause him to intermittently transform into a bloodthirsty female alter ego with a mind of her own, who herself murders women in order to use their blood to prolong the transformation, hoping to eventually usurp control from Jekyll entirely. Losing control of Hyde and hunted for both their roles in the murders, Jekyll throws himself from a balcony, killing both Hyde and himself. *Dr. Jekyll and Ms. Hyde* attempts a lighter, more comedic approach. Its protagonist, Richard, is a descendent of the original Dr. Jekyll who works for a cosmetics company, creating perfumes. When his boss announces 'This is a woman's perfume, and I want a woman working on it!', Richard finds his job in jeopardy, and begins recklessly experimenting with more "feminine" fragrances, using chemical formulae from his ancestor's notes. These experiments cause him to periodically transform into Helen Hyde, an assertive, sexually aggressive 'crazy bitch' with a distinct personality from Richard. Announcing 'I've got Richard's brain and this body. In two weeks, I'll own this company', Helen is hired as a secretary and uses her sex appeal to manipulate her male superiors (including one who is homosexual; such is her attractiveness), quickly getting promoted ahead of Richard and sabotaging his career. Realising that Helen is trying to ruin his life, Richard develops an antidote that purges Helen from his body entirely.

Films which focus on female-to-male transformations are rarer. *Willy/Milly* (Schneider, 1986) tells the story of Milly, a girl in her early teens, whose interest in astronomy is not taken seriously by the boys at her school because she is a girl. Wishing on a star that she was a boy, Milly awakes to find that her wish was granted, and is now a boy

called Willy (played by the same actor in baggier clothing). Willy makes friends with the boys in the astronomy group, and begins to develop a mutual attraction with one of them, Alfie, who becomes terrified that his 'unnatural desires' make him a 'faggot'. Wishing to pursue a heterosexual relationship with Alfie, Willy chooses to change back into Milly, becoming Alfie's girlfriend. A similar kind of relationship features in *Virtual Sexuality* (Hurrant, 1999). Justine, a girl in her late teens, believes that all men are 'overgrown infants' and that only an imaginary, ideal man can satisfy her. Justine then creates her ideal boyfriend, Jake, using an experimental virtual reality machine, but the machine malfunctions and Justine finds herself trapped in Jake's body. Jake moves in with Chas, a male friend of Justine's who is secretly in love with her. Over time, Jake comes to realise that Chas, who Justine dismissed as a computer nerd 'sadder than the sad people of sad city', is more sensitive and kind-hearted than other, more macho teenage boys, and that Justine had judged him unfairly. The truth is then revealed: Justine did not become Jake; Jake simply has a copy of Justine's memories, and the real Justine has no idea that he was brought to life at all. Jake then confronts Justine and explains that Chas is the right man for her, not the "ideal" boyfriend in her imagination, before deleting himself. Chas and Justine then become a couple.

Most pertinent to this project's discussion of "TG" media are a pair of texts in which male-to-female sex-change transformations are unambiguously positive due to the narratives embracing a particular kind of reactionary postfeminist worldview in which women are represented as privileged over men. These are the 1994 French comic *Une Femme dans la Peau* (Walthéry, 1994/2004) and the 2002 film *The Hot Chick* (Brady, 2002). *Une Femme dans la Peau* ("In a Woman's Skin") uses its transformation, much like the aforementioned *Kampfer*, largely as a pretext for sexual exploitation, but what plot there is



demonstrates a number of reactionary assumptions common to “TG” media narratives. Furthermore, in the absence of an official English translation, an unofficial English translation was created, archived and distributed entirely through the “TG” community, initially appearing on *Farhad’s TG Site* in 2004 and then, in a revised edition, on the “TG” site *Joe Six Pack* in 2012. This discussion of *Une Femme dans la Peau* will be referring to the translation available on *Farhad’s TG Site*, credited to a translator called Tom Sinclair.

*Une Femme dans la Peau* is the story of a middle-aged insurance salesman, Antoine, who is constantly distracted from his job by the numerous attractive young women who work in his office. After Antoine is killed in a traffic accident, his brain is taken by a mad scientist and placed in the body of a beautiful young woman. Escaping and reinventing themselves as “Johanna”, they become a successful nude centrefold model, acquiring enough money to buy a luxurious home and spend their days sunbathing topless by their pool, much to the delight of their male neighbours. Three subsequent volumes continue the story, with Johanna chased across the world by people who wish to harness the scientist’s brain transplant technology, but this largely functions as a means of keeping Johanna moving, having sexual encounters with women, dressing in exotic outfits, and using their sex appeal to manipulate the kind of men that Antoine had once been. What is notable about *Une Femme dans la Peau* is that it takes the trope, discussed above, in which a male-to-female sex-change transformation is used temporarily to seduce others, and makes it both permanent and a major part of the narrative. While all their sexual encounters are with women, Johanna’s source of income and affluent lifestyle are supported by catering to male sexual desires as a centrefold model, with men reduced to slobbering animals who will pay anything to see Johanna’s body. Even when on the run in later volumes, Johanna is able to

avoid the need for money by manipulating men with sex appeal (though no actual sex) and going undercover as an exotic dancer.

Rather than the transformations discussed earlier, in which a male character briefly became female for the purposes of seduction, then returned to their original body once the seduction was no longer necessary, *Une Femme dans la Peau* depicts the transformed male character's original body as entirely useless. Antoine is depicted not only as poor and lonely, but as a slave to the women around him, who constantly tease him with their bodies, prominently displaying breasts, thighs and buttocks which he cannot touch for fear of being (correctly) accused of sexual harassment. Antoine's unrequited sexual lust is ultimately what kills him, as an attractive young woman leaves her bag on the subway, and Antoine is hit and killed by a bus while frantically attempting to return it to her in the hopes of getting her attention (even as he lies dying on the road, Antoine's last act is to look up her skirt). Life as Johanna not only brings money, fame and excitement, but also allows Antoine to take control of the female sexuality that caused him such frustration. Furthermore, despite *Une Femme dans la Peau* representing men as aggressively obsessed with sex and unable to view women as anything other than objects, Johanna is never made *unsafe* by this, always remaining in control while the men, rendered helpless, respect boundaries; the only men who threaten Johanna are assassins who do so because they desire the secrets of the scientist's brain transfer experiments. Here, masculinity and femininity are not complementary halves, and Antoine is not granted more empathy with women through the experience; rather, female sex appeal explicitly grants women control over men, making the transformation into Johanna a means for Antoine to enter a more privileged social position with access to vastly increased wealth, leisure time, and sexual pleasure. This reactionary

representation of the “power” female sexuality has over men is a common theme in antifeminist literature, which will be discussed at length in Chapter 7.

The second, and more significant to the discussion of “TG” media, is the female-to-male transformation film *The Hot Chick* (Brady, 2002). In *The Hot Chick*, a popular high school girl, Jessica, exchanges bodies with a middle-aged male petty criminal, Clive. While both characters are transformed, the focus of the film is on Jessica, in Clive’s body, attempting to locate their original body and reverse the transformation. As with *Une Femme dans la Peau*, what is notable about *The Hot Chick* in comparison to other media discussed in this section is that Jessica is, while in the body of an adult male, represented as *less* privileged and *more* vulnerable than as a teenage girl, and is taught humility by the experience. Jessica’s original life is described as ‘perfect’ and ‘like a fairytale’, with Jessica able to use her sex appeal and popularity to treat people of both sexes poorly without consequence, but in Clive’s body, Jessica becomes a ‘maximum loser’ on the receiving end of abuse. When Jessica finally locates Clive, it is revealed that Clive, using Jessica’s body, has become both a successful stripper and a local criminal known as ‘The Hot Chick Bandit’, who uses their looks to lure men into alleyways and rob them. Clive refuses to switch back – ‘Finders keepers, sweetheart!’ – as using Jessica’s body to manipulate men out of their money, both on and off stage, is represented as safer and more lucrative than Clive’s former life as a male petty criminal. Clive switches back only when threatened, and is immediately placed in a situation in which it is implied he will be raped by another man.

As the following section of this chapter will demonstrate, *The Hot Chick* is one of the few pieces of mainstream media to receive an overwhelmingly positive evaluation by the

“TG” community. In contrast to this, the other mainstream media narratives discussed above receive a fare more lukewarm response from the “TG” community, and in some cases are met with outright hostility. The remainder of this chapter will focus on discussing this fractious relationship between the “TG” community and mainstream media, demonstrating that the “TG” community has codified its own set of conventions as to what makes sex-change transformation stories pleasurable. These conventions are often at odds with mainstream media narratives, but are a regular feature of the original narratives produced by the “TG” community. In contrast to the mainstream narratives discussed above, this new “TG” media will present society as favouring women over men, and present its transformations as empowering and pleasurable, rather than humiliating or deceptive. The following section will discuss how this difference in approach to the depiction of sex-change transformations sets “TG” media apart as its own distinct genre.

### ‘Cultural Consensus’: What Would Qualify “TG” As A Distinct Genre?

As discussed in the introduction, early “TG” websites were composed largely of material drawn from professionally produced media, including many of the works discussed above. Superficially, this appears to require no further analysis: An audience who were interested in sex-change transformations began curating online archives of media which featured these transformations, then began to create their own media to meet demand. This would be sufficient were sex-change transformations simply treated as a plot device, or as an end in themselves, existing in a narrative vacuum. The early archival websites discussed in the introduction often *do* take this approach, with individual comic panels, film

frames and static drawings presented unencumbered by context, sometimes even lacking an identifying description outside of their URL.

However, a closer reading reveals that the shift towards original “TG” media occurred not simply to meet demand, but because the “TG” community developed its own set of expectations with regard to how sex-change transformations “should” be depicted. As this chapter will later demonstrate, the professional media discussed above proves largely incapable of meeting these audience expectations (some does, if only in part), meaning that the “TG” community are forced to create their own media should they desire to see sex-change transformations depicted in accordance with “TG” expectations. Over time, this original media developed its own set of conventions, becoming its own distinct genre: the “TG” media which is this project’s object of study.

The gradual emergence and development of a distinct “TG” genre among the “TG” community is understandable, given that genres are mutable, ever-shifting categories. As Altman (1984) cautions, such an approach renders it impossible to reconcile analysis of a genre as a static, ahistorical category with analysis of a genre’s historical development over time. Genres do not ‘spring full-blown from the head of Zeus’ (Altman, 1984, p. 8), nor are they ‘Platonic categories, existing outside the flow of time’ (ibid). Altman’s later work distils this argument; ‘genres are not inert categories shared by all (although at some moments they certainly seem to be), but discursive claims made by real speakers for particular purposes in specific situations’ (Altman, 1999, p. 101). Tudor’s essay “Genre” (Grant, 2012) avoids this “Platonic” approach and argues for the shifting nature of genre categories by demonstrating how these categories are created via a shared discourse between creators

and audiences. Taking the Western genre as his example, Tudor defines the genre as simply 'common cultural consensus as to what constitutes a Western' (Tudor, 2012, p. 5). These constituents include 'gun-fights, black and white clothing corresponding to good and bad distinctions, revenge themes, typed villains [...] The best evidence for the widespread recognition of these conventions is to be found in those films that pointedly set out to invoke them' (ibid). This leads to not only the generic Western which invokes these conventions on their own terms, but also to the parody Western *Blazing Saddles*, the Daffy Duck cartoon *Drip-Along Daffy*, the alternate history Western *Wild Wild West*, and science fiction Western *Cowboys and Aliens*, all of which rely on the audience's recognition that an established convention of "the Western genre" is being parodied, subverted or deconstructed. That the creators of these films can safely make this assumption about their audience demonstrates that a shared cultural consensus on what constitutes "the Western genre" exists.

Returning to Altman, his essay "Reusable Packaging" (Altman, 1998) argues that a genre comes into its own once its name used as both an adjective and a noun: 'the very same word sometimes appears as both parts of speech: *musical comedies* or just plain *musicals*, *western romances* or merely *westerns*...' (Altman, 1998, p. 3). As Altman explains, early uses of a generic classification are adjectival descriptions 'describing and delimiting a broader established category' (ibid), the increasing development of that generic category leads to us 'giving the adjective the status of a noun [...] When a descriptive adjective becomes a categorical noun, it is thus loosened from the tyranny of that noun' (ibid). The example used by Altman is the way in which the adjective / noun pair "Epic Poetry" initially denoted a specific kind of poetry, but with time, the adjective "Epic" became a noun used to

refer to “Epic” works outside of poetry, such as “Epic Films” like *War and Peace* and *Lord of the Rings*: ‘Before, epic was one of the possible qualities of the primary category *poetry*; now film is one of the possible manifestations of the primary category *epic*’ (ibid, emphasis in original).

The remainder of this chapter will demonstrate that “TG” is a distinct genre based on these two criteria. Firstly, the intertextual discourse among the “TG” media creators and audience, with “TG” texts identified as “TG”, discussed with reference to other “TG” texts, and used as a point of comparison for how “TG” texts should or should not function. Secondly, evidence of Altman’s “substantifying process”, in which “TG” begins as an adjective applied to existing generic categories, and over time becomes a generic category of its own to which other adjectival descriptors can be applied.

#### ‘The TG Element Was Very Poor’: Audience Discourse on *Metamorphose.org*

The history of Craig Wenhurst’s website *Metamorphose.org* has been discussed already in the introductory chapter; an online searchable database of transformations found in media, *Metamorphose.org* began in 2000 and continues to be regularly updated with new transformations to this day. Rather than functioning purely as a database, however, *Metamorphose.org* also allows for audience input in the form of reviews and commentaries on the media catalogued. In this section, this commentary will be used to demonstrate that the professional, mainstream media catalogued on *Metamorphose.org*, although it features sex-change transformations prominently, is frequently criticised and rejected by the

website's community on the grounds that it does not adhere to the conventions established as integral to "TG" media. This, and the following discussions of other audience discourses, demonstrates that the creators and audience of "TG" media defines it as something distinct from mainstream media which features a sex-change transformation.

The *Metamorphose.org* database lists 3905 instances of sex-change transformations across all its submitted media ("Category: Gender", 2017). This is by far the most common category of transformation catalogued by *Metamorphose.org*, with the next most common being human to animal transformations at 1010 entries ("Category: Animal", 2017), and third most common being changes in size, at 392 ("Category: Size", 2017). As every individual entry in the *Metamorphose.org* database can be reviewed by its users, these reviews provide a means of examining what the "TG" audience considers worthy of both praise and criticism.

To begin with, the audience of *Metamorphose.org* are interested only in complete physical sex-change transformations, reacting negatively to cross-dressing, illusions, mind-control, and the representation of realistic trans\* characters. Of particular note is a lengthy debate over the inclusion of the cartoon *SheZow*, discussed earlier in this chapter, in which the simplistic art style makes it unclear if the protagonist physically transforms from male to female, or is simply wearing a female costume. A user opens the discussion with 'Although it's 99% probably just a crossdress, the show remains open to the idea that there is a gender TF, since the issue will never be clearly spelled out in a children's cartoon', to which another replies that 'In multiple interviews, the creator has made it clear that it is just a costume' ("*SheZow*", 2013), and another warns 'You keep this and you'll soon be flooded with



transvestite entry's [*sic*], having set a precedent' (ibid). The *SheZow* entry was ultimately retained, but now features a disclaimer. The entry on the film *Different for Girls*, a romantic drama about a trans woman, includes a review saying it contains 'no transformation of the sort this list is interested in' ("Different for Girls", n.d.); an entry on the comic *Doom Patrol*, which features a trans woman in the supporting cast, is described as 'marked for deletion [...] She is a Male to Female transsexual [...] there is no transformation' ("Doom Patrol issue Unknown", n.d.), and the entry on the trans woman-centric crime novel *Transfixed* features a complaint that it 'sounds like no transformation at all', and a request that it be deleted ("Comment: Transfixed", n.d.). Other entries face rejection, even though they are not "realistic", on the grounds that they do not feature a physical transformation. The inclusion of an episode of the television series *Weird Science* is criticised for including a realistic illusion, which causes the male protagonists to be seen as women but does not alter them physically: '[E]verybody ELSE sees them as girls, but they're not. This episode probably belongs on a different list' ("Review: Weird Science episode The Feminine Mistake", n.d.). The entry on the film *Frankenstein Created Woman* features reviews critical of its inclusion on *Metamorphose.org*, as the male soul occupying a female body is presented 'more as if he's a ghost hovering somewhere close by and she's just haunted by him' ("Review: Frankenstein Created Woman", n.d.). Other reviews agree that 'The TG part is vague', the 'TG elements [are] just hinted at' and that 'The TG element was very poor [...] he was telling her what to do rather than being in control' (ibid). A similar criticism is levelled at the film *Gamer*, in which characters' bodies are remotely controlled for the pleasure of others, because the men who control female bodies (often to vicariously experience sexual encounters) are 'seeing from a third-person perspective' rather than directly inhabiting them ("no longer pending submission – the movie Gamer", n.d.).

Much discussion is made of how the physical transformations themselves are depicted, with praise given to media that includes long, detailed sequences, and sequences in which the transformed character realises that their body has changed sex. *Dr Jekyll and Sister Hyde* is praised by *Metamorphose.org*'s contributors for its multiple, lengthy sequences in which the male Jekyll transforms into the female Hyde: 'The initial transformation scene is a credit to both actors [...] Also noteworthy in that the second transformation is almost as good as the the [sic] first [...] All subsequent transformations [sic] at least partially appear on screen' ("Review: Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde", n.d.). Other reviews agree that it features a 'Very sexy morph' and that the 'transformations are good'. The initial transformation sequence in the later Jekyll riff, *Dr. Jekyll & Ms. Hyde*, receive similar praise for being 'Almost a complete copy the first "Dr Jeckyl/Sister Hyde" Transformation' ("Review: Dr. Jeckyl And Ms. Hyde", n.d.), while another review summarises the film as simply 'Very bad movie, but nice transformations'. *Memory Run*'s transformation sequence is also praised for focusing on the protagonist's gradual realising that their body is now female. '[It] was riveting to actually SEE Andre awaken and realize he's in Josette's body' ("Review: Synapse", n.d.), 'the scene where he/she awakens after the transformation is terrific' (ibid), and 'The scene where he wakes up and discovers who [sic] body he is in is GREAT!' (ibid).

However, media which plays its transformations for laughs is criticised for failing to seriously explore the experience. A review criticises *Cleo/Leo* for its comedic approach to transformation, considering it ridiculous that '[The protagonist] gets in a car, makes a phone call, drives to a buddy's place, strips nude, and all this time isn't freaked [...] It was done for comic effect, but again, stretched too far' ("Review: Cleo Leo", n.d.). Another reviewer

voices a similar concern over the film's failure to adequately explain 'how someone who's been turned from a big fat man into a petite curvy woman could [...] undress in front of a bunch of guys WITHOUT NOTICING anything was amiss!' (ibid). Even *Dr. Jekyll & Ms. Hyde*, while praised above for its transformation sequences, is criticised for the sequences' comic tone, with *Metamorphose.org*'s reviewers disappointed that the 'changes occur all for laughs', and that the transformations are 'done in the annoying "when he least expects it" style' (Review: Dr. Jekyll And Ms. Hyde, n.d.). Media is also criticised for not focusing on the transformation process itself. *Willy/Milly*'s lack of a transformation sequence leads to it being dismissed by with 'If you've seen the promotional art, the cartoon of Milly peeking into her pajamas, you've seen the best of it' ("Review: Something Special", n.d.), the transformation in *Equinox Knocks* is criticised for 'happen[ing] overnight' ("Review: Equinox Knocks", n.d.), and the multiple transformations in the novel *Dragonsword* are likewise criticised for taking place 'off camera' ("Review: Gael Baudino book DragonSword", n.d.). Even an otherwise extremely positive review of *Goodbye Charlie* still opens with the qualifier 'Although there is no actual transformation sequence...' ("Review: Goodbye Charlie", n.d.).

Reviews on *Metamorphose.org* also praise media in which the transformations are permanent, and criticise media in which the transformations are eventually reversed. The *Metamorphose.org* entry on the body-swap comedy *It's A Boy Girl Thing* causes a reviewer to wonder aloud 'how come at the end of these kind of movies the character always switch [sic] back' ("Comment: It's A Boy-Girl Thing", n.d.), and the fantasy film *Deathstalker*, in which the villain's underling is transformed into a duplicate of a princess, is criticised because 'the guard should have remained in her form as punishment' ("Review:

Deathstalker”, n.d.). A review of Image Comics’ “Babewatch” event, discussed earlier, wishes that at least ‘some of the changes had been permanent [*sic*]’ (“Review: Babewatch issue Unknown”, n.d.) rather than reversed at the story’s end. In comparison, the comic *Mantra*’s depiction of the protagonist’s permanent transformation from male to female receives a positive review: ‘BABEWATCH was a dumb joke by comparison with MANTRA, which ran for 24 great issues’ (“Review: Mantra issue Unknown”, n.d.). A minor male-to-female transformation in the film *Stardust* disappoints the reviewers; ‘alas he became male again’ (“New TG in movie Stardust”, n.d.) However, the protagonist of *Cleo/Leo*’s decision to remain female is assessed positively as ‘an ending which accepts womanhood and love, unlike most movies which cop out with death, change-back, or lesbianism’ (“Review: Switch”, n.d.), explicitly linking “womanhood” with heterosexuality. *Memory Run* is also praised for lacking such a “cop out”: ‘the man in the woman’s body does very well especially at the end when she accepts [*sic*] her new self - thinking she a lot better off as a caring woman with love than the unhappy loney [*sic*] man’ (“Review: Synapse”, n.d.).

*Metamorphose.org* reviewers also praise media in which transformed male characters enjoy being female, and criticise media which portrays the experience negatively. *The Hot Chick* receives immense praise for its scenes in which the antagonist uses their new female body to become a stripper, and refuses to give it up. One reviewer ‘really liked the fact that Clive enjoys being a woman and he doesn’t want to swap back’ (“Comment: The Hot Chick”, n.d.), another is happy that ‘he enjoyed being a stripper! And so would I!’ (ibid); other reviewers agree that ‘he loves being her making a good living as stripper, lap dancer’ (“Review: The Hot Chick”, n.d.) and that ‘I certainly doubt that I’d want to give up that sweet, young (and virgin) body’ (ibid). Similar praise is given to the depiction of a shape-

changing alien who becomes a *Playboy* centrefold in the film *Critters 2*, 'Undoubtely [*sic*], he/she enjoys with his/her new body [...] "she" takes a look at "her" breasts and feels great' ("Review: Critters 2", n.d.). *Ice Angel* receives a positive review because the transformed protagonist must 'embrace his new life' ("Review: Ice Angel", n.d.), and *Cleo/Leo* is compared favourably to *Switch* by one review for 'the scene where "he" gives up and "she" takes over', which is 'something Switch copped out on' ("Review: Cleo Leo", n.d.).

Transformed male characters who do not enjoy being female, however, receive criticism. In particular, the portrayal of the misogyny experienced by transformed characters in the medieval society depicted in the novel *Dragonsword*, discussed earlier in this chapter, incites vitriol from *Metamorphose.org*'s reviewers. The book is criticised by one review for its 'heavy-handed, stereotypical depictions of a misogynistic, chauvinistic society' ("Review: Gael Baudino book DragonSword", n.d.), while another review argues that 'The subplot about the soldiers had fascinating potential [...] until it all devolves into a preposterous, melodramatic, militant feminist sociology lecture' (ibid). Further reviews take issue with the way *Dragonsword* presents femininity as subordinated and disempowering, with the audience warned that they'll 'see rape referenced and experienced multiple times' (ibid), and that it is not recommended for 'those reading it merely for the promise of mass, forced transsexualization [*sic*]' (ibid). Other depictions of transformed characters experiencing misogyny are likewise criticised. Reviews of the short film *Turntables*, about a sexist DJ transformed into a woman as punishment, criticise its 'standard "sexist male punishment" scenario' ("Turntables", n.d.) and its depiction of men as 'sexist pigs [...] some maybe but no [*sic*] all of them are like that' (ibid). The misogyny depicted in *Cleo/Leo*, however, is accepted because of its comedic tone: 'the usual moral lessons about how women are mistreated by

men [are] for purposes of comic filler' ("Review: Cleo Leo", n.d.) The exploitation horror film *I Hate My Body* is also criticised by *Metamorphose.org* for depicting its protagonist's discomfort at having their brain placed in a female body. One review expresses disappointment that the protagonist 'never comes to terms with it' ("Review: I Hate My Body", n.d.), while another review claims that 'You get the impression that she could have adapted [...] but self-loathing gets in the way' (ibid). Another review simply posits that the film's premise is fundamentally wrong: 'why they didnt [*sic*] make a version called I Love My Body is beyond me' (ibid). *Switch*, previously used as a point of comparison for *Cleo/Leo*, is similarly criticised for its protagonist's lack of 'pride in being a beautiful woman' ("Review: Switch", n.d.).

*Metamorphose.org* reviewers are particularly praiseworthy of media in which transformed characters behave in stereotypically feminine ways, and are critical of media in which this does not happen. *Goodbye Charlie* receives praise from reviewers because the protagonist, post-transformation, 'doesn't spend any time wearing men's clothes or wobbling around in heels - she just adapts' ("Review: Goodbye Charlie", n.d.), while *Switch* is criticised for its approach, which involved 'Way too many jokes about his/her inability to walk in high heels' ("Review: Switch", n.d.). Reviewers are also disappointed in a sub-plot from the comic *Elektra*, in which a male supporting character is permanently transformed into a woman, as the character later 'gets a hideous, pierced, shaven headed, butch makeover' ("Review: Elektra issue Unknown", n.d.), and that the woman playing a transformed character in the pornographic film *Angel On Fire* is 'not attractive [...] This is even made ludicrous when the new woman thinks about how beautiful she is (HA!) and wants to become a model (as if!)' ("Review: Angel On Fire", n.d.). Reviews of the film *Dating*

*the Enemy* praise it for 'the scene where the man in the woman's body is trying on women's lingerie and thinks how sexy he/she looks' ("Review: Dating the Enemy", n.d.). Similarly, a reviewer praises *The Hot Chick* for making its antagonist stereotypically feminine after acquiring a female body: 'he's pretty crude as a man, but really is well groomed and sexily dressed as a woman!' ("Review: The Hot Chick", n.d.). Reviewers of *Synapse* express disappointment that the film does not depict the protagonist being "trained" to act stereotypically feminine after their transformation: 'Not enough of [...] his being tutored as a woman' ("Review: Synapse", n.d.), writes one reviewer, while another writes that 'The only disappointment is they don't show his training as a woman' (ibid).

Praise is also heaped on *The Hot Chick* not for what appears in the film as released, but for the inclusion of deleted scenes on the DVD, with *Metamorphose.org* users suggesting that readers pick up the DVD for the deleted scenes alone, ignoring the narrative of the film entirely. 'Does anyone know what and if specials there are on the DVD? I hear there was a rather long cut montage of Clive enjoying himself' ("Comment: The Hot Chick", n.d.), asks one user, to which another replies with a list of deleted scenes: 'Clive lookd [*sic*] at his bopdyin [*sic*] a make-up mirror & steals cosmetics. In another store in [*sic*] steals money & a sexy negelgee [*sic*] [...] the bets [*sic*] oone [*sic*] is thee [*sic*] extended sscene [*sic*] in the [strip] club & does Clive enjoy himself and the power of his neww [*sic*] sexy young body!' (ibid). Another user than announces 'great, now I have to get the dvd!' (ibid). The DVD is also recommended by users in a separate review thread: 'The movie itself is nothing short of boring and non-comedic [...] you may want to check it out for nothing else but the deleted scenes' ("Review: The Hot Chick", n.d.), 'I thought the movie was OK [...] on the DVD in deleted scenes there are 2 or 3 scenes of him as the girl' (ibid). Even though the movie

itself is reviewed poorly, the audience of *Metamorphose.org* are still able to enjoy it by simply focusing on the sequences of Clive, in Jessica's body, using femininity and sexuality to succeed where their male self had failed.

The attitude of *Metamorphose.org*'s audience is perhaps best summed up by a user comment on *Cleo/Leo*, which simply reads 'I don't think there is a movie with a TG [theme] that has been done really well' ("Review: Cleo Leo", n.d.). Despite the abundance of visual media featuring sex-change transformations, the media produced outside of the "TG" community has, on the whole, failed to deliver the kind of "TG" story the audience of *Metamorphose.org* expect: Transformations are not explored in enough detail, are not graphic enough, do not last long enough, are not sexy enough, transformed characters are not feminine enough, and being transformed is not always a wholly positive experience. As the next section will demonstrate, these expectations are not unfounded; material created specifically for the web does, in fact, fulfil this desire for male-to-female transformations depicted as a positive experience for characters, and its tropes are common enough to be codified by fans into what the website *TV Tropes* calls the Laws of Gender-Bending.

### 'The First Law of Gender-Bending At Work': TV Tropes Codifies "TG" Tropes

This section will continue the discussion of "TG" as a genre by moving from audience discourse on *Metamorphose.org* to audience discourse on the open-source fandom website *TV Tropes* (<http://www.tvtropes.org/>). The *TV Tropes* audience are more concerned with media categorisation than critique, and demonstrate consensus on two points: Firstly, the



existence of a distinct online comic genre called “Transformation Comic” which revolves around male characters becoming female, and secondly, that “Transformation Comic” narratives are entirely separate from attempts at realistically representing trans\* characters, and are defined by their own unique set of narrative conventions. That these narrative conventions mirror the desires expressed by the *Metamorphose.org* audience further demonstrates the legitimacy of “TG” as a genre, rather than simply a collection of narratives featuring sex-change transformations.

The open-source website *TV Tropes* provides a wealth of information that helps to establish “TG” as a distinct genre. Launched in 2004, *TV Tropes* describes itself as an ‘all-devouring pop-culture wiki’ (“Welcome to TV Tropes”, 2017) where, unlike the similarly open-source encyclopedia *Wikipedia*, ‘there is no such thing as notability’ (“There is No Such Thing as Notability”, 2017). This means that any piece of media, or narrative trope found within media, is deemed worthy of inclusion regardless of its obscurity or non-professional nature, making it a haven not only for fandoms who wish to list relatively inconsequential details about mainstream media, but also for fandoms of obscure, niche media.

As expected, given the vast number of “TG” websites referred to in the project’s introduction, *TV Tropes* contains multiple entries dealing with “TG” media, and with the narrative tropes common to the genre. The purpose of this section is to use the entries in *TV Tropes* to help demonstrate that, while still an obscure, niche interest, there is enough common consensus among the “TG” audience and creators as to what makes “TG” media distinct from other media featuring sex-change transformations. One such entry is “Transformation Comic”, which the *TV Tropes* audience define as follows:

A Transformation Comic uses transformation as a central plot device [...] Since transformation as a primary theme tends to appeal to a niche market, most examples are Web Comics [...]

Common transformations include but are not limited to: Gender Bender - Male to female is most common (First Law of Genderbending at work) [...] This does not include characters who are realistic Transsexuals or Crossdressers ("Transformation Comic", 2017)

The "Transformation Comic" *TV Tropes* page lists fifty-four examples of online transformation comics, twenty-two of which use male-to-female sex-change transformation, making it by far the most represented form of transformation in the "Transformation Comic" entry (other forms include centaurs, breast expansion, humanoid animals, and giants). Among these comics are several previously discussed examples of "TG" media; *The Watch*, *Abstract Gender*, *Troop 37*, *Cheer!*, and so on. The page also specifies that, should the reader be curious as to why almost all the sex-change transformations listed are male-to-female, they should refer to what *TV Tropes* calls "The First Law of Gender-Bending".

The First Law of Gender-Bending has its own dedicated *TV Tropes* page, as do the Second Law and Third Law. According to *TV Tropes*, the depiction of a fictional character who has their sex changed is beholden to these three laws, examples of which are catalogued on each page. As defined by their respective *TV Tropes* entry, the three laws are as follows:

### First Law of Gender-Bending

Once a girl has been created, circumstances will conspire to keep her a girl.

(“First Law of Gender-Bending”, 2017)

### Second Law of Gender-Bending

Any character, after being gender-bent, will come to enjoy their new gender more than their old gender.

(“Second Law of Gender-Bending”, 2017)

### Third Law of Gender-Bending

A gender-bent character will either embrace or be subject to all of the stereotypes associated with their new gender.

(“Third Law of Gender-Bending”, 2017)

What is immediately noticeable upon reading the laws is that, while *TV Tropes* uses the neutral term ‘gender’, it is implicit in the First Law’s use of ‘Once a girl has been created...’ that the default transformation is male-to-female, revealing a bias in these narratives towards exploring femininity from a male point of view. Reading each law’s *TV Tropes* page in full, however, reveals their significance to this project’s discussion of “TG”: Far from being “laws” covering all depictions of male-to-female transformation, these tropes, by and large, apply *only* to the web media produced by and for the “TG” community. What will follow is a brief overview of the way *TV Tropes* cites examples of the Three Laws, which demonstrate how heavily slanted they are towards contemporary “TG” media

created for the web, and almost never applicable to media produced outside the “TG” community. This will be demonstrated by comparing the number of instances that a Law of Gender-Bending is cited as appearing in mainstream media, both Western and Japanese (*TV Tropes* explicitly makes a ‘Western’ vs ‘Japanese’ distinction when discussing media), with the number of times the same Law of Gender-Bending is cited in web media (the “Web Comic” and “Web Original” categories). Note that *TV Tropes* articles frequently include counter-examples of a trope on the grounds that subverting the norm is notable; when tallying these numbers, any examples listed as a “subversion”, “aversion”, etc. of a Law of Gender-Bending were ignored.

The First Law of Gender-Bending asserts that most male-to-female transformations are permanent in nature, but lists only two examples of this “Law” from cinema, four examples from television, one example from Western animation, four examples from video games, ten examples from literature, and six examples from comic books. Japanese anime and manga provide fourteen examples. Media created for the web, however, provides thirty-four examples of the First Law; almost as much as the other categories combined. This is supported by the earlier review of sex-change transformations in media, with most of the media discussed reversing its transformations by the end, with permanent transformations, such as *Cleo/Leo*, being in the minority. However, when looking at the reviews on *Metamorphose.org*, it was demonstrated that reversing transformations was received negatively by its audience.

The Second Law of Gender-Bending asserts that any (assumed male) character who is transformed will enjoy being female far more than they did being male. As with the First

Law, there are few examples of this in professional media. There is one example from film, nine examples from literature, one example from television, one example from video games, and two examples from Western animation. Japanese anime and manga provide seven examples. Media created for the web provides twenty-two; more than all other categories combined. Again, the discrepancy between web media and other media is supported by the mainstream media reviewed earlier in this chapter, with sex-change transformations, while not always depicted as outright negative, rarely depicted as being outright superior. This is also consistent with the reviews on *Metamorphose.org*, and their grievances about transformed men who fail to enjoy femininity. This “law” is especially pertinent in light of the later discussion of “TG” media, in which transformed characters invariably find being female to be far more pleasurable than being male, in terms of both sensuality and personal agency.

The Third Law of Gender-Bending states that a character who has been transformed into the opposite sex will invariably end up embodying all the gender stereotypes associated with their current sex, something which also becomes a recurring feature of the “TG” media discussed later. One example is taken from film, one from comic books, four from television, four from Western animation, and ten from literature. Japanese anime and manga provide eight examples. Media created for the web provides thirty-five; again, more than all other categories combines. Based on the earlier review of media, however, this is the most common of the three Laws of Gender-Bending appearing in mainstream media, albeit played for comedy; for example, the protagonist of *SheZow* possesses a pink costume and super powers based on cosmetics, but this is presented as a comedic subversion of his belief in the superhero as a male power fantasy. The previously discussed reviews and comments

on *Metamorphose.org* were, predictably, hostile to transformed characters who were depicted as failing to perform femininity, while positive towards media that depicted transformed characters as feminine, seductive and sexualised.

As stated earlier, *TV Tropes'* discussion of sex-change transformations is far from exhaustive, especially in comparison with *Metamorphose.org*, with its Rules of Gender-Bending entries listing media in the dozens, rather than the hundreds or thousands, as *Metamorphose.org* does. What this examination of *TV Tropes* does demonstrate, however, is that a discourse exists surrounding the concept of a "transformation comic" produced for the web, and that such a comic – when the transformation in question is one of sex – is expected to follow certain narrative conventions with regard to how the transformation is depicted. The characters are not realistic portrayals of trans\* people; the transformations are male-to-female and permanent; the transformed characters will enjoy being female more than they enjoyed being male; and, while female, the characters will become, willingly or not, exaggerated stereotypes of femininity. While undeniably an obscure niche, the "TG" media community has still produced a discourse among its audience and creators that codify how stories in "TG" media are expected to function. In tandem with the earlier material drawn from *Metamorphose.org*, this demonstrates that the "TG" community has created the kind of common cultural consensus and discursive formations that mark "TG" as a distinct genre, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The remainder of this chapter will further demonstrate this by using Altman's argument for the development of a genre from an adjective to a noun.

## 'TG Blogger and Webmaster Group, Powered by World of TG and TG Central':

### Substantification

This section will further demonstrate that "TG" is a distinct genre by focusing on Altman's arguments around "substantification". As discussed earlier in this chapter, Altman demonstrates a genre's development by charting its shift from an adjective to a noun; from an additional descriptor applied to an existing genre or media classification to a stand-alone classification in and of itself.

As the corpus of material drawn on for this project will demonstrate, "TG" media freely borrows from a multiplicity of existing genres to tell its stories. The directory website *World of TG* (<http://www.worldoftg.com/>) links to 76 "TG" web comics, arranged alphabetically with no generic classification beyond "TG". These include *Abstract Gender*, a comedy set in a high school; *Angels & Aliens*, a thriller about genetically altered spies; *Drop Dead Gorgeous*, a comedy set in the afterlife; *Exiern*, a parody of "sword and sorcery" fantasy; *Jet Dream*, an action series about a squadron of pilots; *Murry and Lewy*, a sex comedy about two adult bachelors; *Sailor Sun*, a parody of the manga and anime *Sailor Moon*; and *The Dragon Doctors*, a comedy-drama about medical professionals in a fantasy setting. The website *TG Comics (and Stories)*, discussed in depth throughout the remainder of this project, likewise provides a directory of fifty-two of "TG" comics which are not hosted on *TG Comics (and Stories)*, as well as hundreds of its own comics. The comics hosted on *TG Comics (and Stories)* are explicitly marked as belonging to certain genres, with the website allowing users to filter by the genre of their choosing: Adventure, Black Humor, Crime, Erotic Romp, Experimental, Fantasy, Historical, Horror, Humor, Magic, Melodrama,

Metafiction, Mystery, Psychological, Pure Smut, Romance, Science Fiction, Slice of Life, Superhero and Supernatural.

The “TG” caption blogs mentioned in the introductory chapter also differentiate their content into generic categories. Returning to *World of TG*’s directory, specialty caption blogs are prevalent: *Exotic TG Captions* promises ‘adventure to exotic worlds’ (Krazy Kay, 2015); *TG Captions 4 Ever* touts its ‘emphasis on fantasy and superhero themes’ (Dunnere ,2014) and has a specific category for captions which involve nanomachines as a plot device; *Magic TG Captions Archive* and *Science TG Captions Archive* deal only in magical and science fiction-themed transformations, respectively; *CrestF TG Captions* focuses on ‘emotion’ (crestf, 2012); and *Asher’s TG Captions* features ‘Magical Mysteries and Scientific Anomalies’ (Graham, 2014). *Divine Intervention* and *Sweet Seduction Shop* both focus on using 2D and 3D artwork of women, rather than photographs, while *Dawn’s Girly Site* promises captioned martial arts images telling the story of ‘A ninja clan [...] cursed by a dying Lord Fujiko to only contain women’ (Dawn, 2013).

This division of “TG” into genres is, in terms of syntax, not strictly consistent with Altman’s argument about adjectives and nouns; “TG” media is much more likely to describe its content as, for example, “TG Science Fiction” rather than “Science Fiction TG”, with “TG” fulfilling the role of the adjective rather than the noun. However, Altman’s “substantification” argument rests on genre terms becoming ‘loosened from the tyranny’ of simply being a descriptor applied to established genre. Given that websites identify themselves as containing “TG” media are listed in “TG” directories and link to other “TG” websites, these websites are communicating to their audience that they contain, first and



foremost, “TG” content. While an audience interested in a science fiction action movie may have found *Memory Run*, and fans of Rob Schneider’s comedies may have seen *The Hot Chick*, only an audience specifically interested in “TG” media would find themselves reading, for example, ‘TG Blogger and Webmaster Group, Powered by World of TG and TG Central’ (Lamb, 2012). While the precise adjective / noun relationship is not identical to Altman’s, the presence of multiple genres on these “TG” websites demonstrates that it is these generic descriptors that are modifying the “TG” genre, rather than the other way around.

On the basis of “TG”’s ability to exist on its own terms, as well as the audience discourses discussed earlier in this chapter, it is reasonable to claim that “TG” currently functions as a generic classification on its own terms, rather than simply designating the presence of a sex-change transformation plot device in a piece of media.

### 3. REVIEW: THE SOCIAL AND MEDIA CONTEXT OF “TG”

Having established that a distinct genre called “TG” emerged in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s, and that it focused on sex-change transformations, this chapter will examine literature pertaining to the discourses around gender during period of time. Given that the project analyses “TG” media based on multiple categories which are effectively “parallel” to each other, this chapter is not the sole review of literature present in the project, as each category includes its own review of literature which is relevant to that category. The literature discussed in this chapter is that which provides a broad overview of engagement with the themes present in “TG” media, hence the chapter’s title referencing ‘context’. These are the intersection of antifeminist and “empowerment” discourses at the turn of the century, the portrayal of trans\* and cross-dressing characters in media, and assumptions about the ontology of gender that will later be used to analyse the project’s “TG” media sample.

As the thesis of this project is that “TG” came into being alongside the intersection of two specific discourses, this chapter will review literature on both; these are, broadly, an antifeminist discourse which claims men are oppressed by women, and an empowerment discourse which claims women have achieved equality. As will be discussed when the project begins engaging with the social context of “TG” media directly, “TG” media does not explicitly engage with feminism, with the single instance in the project’s corpus being an issue of *The Watch* which uses feminism as justification for a villain’s desire to eliminate all men from the world by transforming them into women. However, certain assumptions

common to antifeminist discourse are nevertheless mirrored in “TG” media, especially those discourses which charge feminism with having created an environment in which women have endless opportunities while men are, if not necessarily oppressed, devalued and redundant. The representation of this opposition between male and female experiences, and “TG” characters’ ability to change from one to the other, leads to the discussion of Social Inversion in Chapter 6.

After the discussion of anxiety around masculinity at the turn of the century, the chapter will then discuss literature pertinent to the portrayal of trans\* and cross-dressing characters in media. As the previous chapter on the “TG” genre demonstrated, the “TG” audience have little interest in sex-change transformation narratives outside those produced by the “TG” community, so an overview of analyses of how trans\* and cross-dressing characters are represented helps develop a better understanding of what the “TG” community are making a point of avoiding. Further discussion of trans and feminist viewpoints will be discussed in the “Research Design” chapter, with reference to epistemology.

### ‘Liberated Single Girls’: Postfeminist Discourse

This chapter will now further develop the project’s engagement postfeminism, a ‘sensitivity characterizing cultural life [...] marked by deeply contradictory trends’ (Gill, 2017 p. 606) which arose in response to the feminist movement of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and will be returned to in great detail in Chapter 8. As Gill’s broad definition suggests, postfeminism

is a phenomenon that lacks a single, stable definition. Turning to Genz & Brabon's (2009/2018) *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories*, the scope of postfeminism is laid out: 'Postfeminism [...] emerged in the late twentieth century in a number of cultural, academic and political contexts, from popular journalism to media to feminist analyses, postmodern theories and neoliberal rhetoric' (Genz & Brabon 2018 p. 1). In popular culture, postfeminism is associated with representations of empowered and independent femininity, such as the Spice Girls and the cast of *Sex and the City*, while in academia it 'refers to a shift in the understanding and construction of identity and gendered categories' (ibid), politically it is 'indicative of [an] era characterised by dramatic changes in basic social relationships, role stereotyping and conceptions of agency' (ibid), and to some critics it is simply 'a conservative backlash' (ibid). As this project is chiefly concerned with how "TG" media represents femininity from a male point of view, this discussion of postfeminism will begin with this backlash.

Susan Faludi, whose *Backlash* (1991/2006) coined the term, describes "backlash" in antifeminist discourses as 'a recurring phenomenon: it returns every time women begin to make some headway toward equality, a seemingly inevitable early frost to the culture's brief flowerings of feminism' (Faludi, 1991/2006, p. 61) which seeks to turn back the gains made by feminist activism by reframing these gains as the causes of social ills; 'You may be free and equal now, it says to women, but you've never been more miserable' (p. 1). Faludi locates the cultural anxiety of the backlash 'center[ed] on two pressure-points' (p. 69), these being 'a woman's claim to her paycheck' (ibid) and 'a woman's control over her own fertility' (ibid). Writing almost twenty years later, Genz & Brabon (2009/2018) examine backlash within the broader context of postfeminism, arguing it is 'one of the key strands'

(p. 87) of postfeminism, which uses the discourse surrounding the gains made by feminism 'primarily as a polemical tool with limited critical and analytical value' (ibid), deployed with the intent of representing feminism as something which had harmed, rather than helped, women. Faludi's *Backlash* cites claims that college educated women over thirty were unlikely to marry, that women focusing on their careers over having children were causing an "infertility epidemic", and that a mental health crisis existed among women who remained single for too long. As Faludi argues, however, none of this was actually true, but rather a manufactured faux-crisis created by misinterpreting social science research in order to legitimate the already existing backlash against women entering the workforce and remaining single. 'By then the public was so steeped in the lore of the backlash [...] Who needed proof? Everyone already believed that the myths about 80's women were true' (p. 60). Of particular relevance to the later discussion of "TG" media is the way in which backlash discourse framed the traditionally male workforce as being under attack from newly-liberated women, while simultaneously emphasising that women possessed a unique "feminine" essence which made them more fit for domestic and emotional labour.

Beginning with the workforce, Faludi states that 'Women, we learned, charged into traditional "male" occupations [...] and barged into the all-male military and blue-collar factories' (p. 375), escaping traditionally female jobs and threatening to overtake traditionally male ones. This was far from the truth, however, with the female workforce instead 'pouring into many low-paid female work ghettos [...] A long list of traditionally "female" jobs became more female dominated, including salesclerking, cleaning services, food preparation and secretarial, administrative work' (ibid) while other women were taking

on 'jobs that men didn't want anymore because their pay, power, and status had declined dramatically' (p. 376), in sharp contrast to the sensational claims quoted earlier.

On the subject of women's innate "femininity" making them unsuited to the male occupations they were ostensibly moving into, Faludi discusses the 'standard tenets of '80s backlash "scholarship"' (p. 308), these being that 'Women with successful careers sacrifice marriage and motherhood' (ibid) and that 'Sex roles are innate: women naturally prefer to cook and keep house and men naturally don't' (ibid). The push for a return to "traditional femininity" in an environment in which women had gained increased independence was reconciled through the commodification of both traditional femininity and independence, and presenting them to women as a consumer choice: '[A]d pages were bristling with images of "liberated single girls" stocking up on designer swimsuits for their Club Med vacations' (p. 90). Simultaneously, 'the beauty industry promoted a "return to femininity" as if it were a revival of natural womanhood' (p. 212). Returning to the later analysis of Genz & Barbon (2009/2018), they note the parallels between postfeminist discourse around women's role in the workforce and postwar discourse. While the economic shifts brought about by the second world war had required women to enter the workforce in larger number, the postwar period called for a return to more traditional roles. Genz & Barbon refer to this as the 'mid-twentieth century backlash' (p. 88), retroactively applying Faludi's term, and note that this backlash is ultimately what 'acted as an impetus for the emergence of second-wave feminism in the late 1960's' (ibid).

In the decades following the publication of *Backlash*, the postfeminist representation of women as newly empowered, independent and liberated from patriarchy – perhaps *too*

liberated – has been a central concern of postfeminist discourse. Imelda Whelehan's *Overloaded* (2000/2010), a feminist analysis of pop-culture discourse at the turn of the millennium – close to a decade after *Backlash*'s initial publication – opens by citing Faludi's work and argues that the same problems identified by Faludi have been 'gathering force' (Whelehan, 2000/2010, p. 17) ever since, and speaks of backlash in the present tense; '[B]acklash works by reassuring people that the 'old' values hold sway because they are undeniably true [...] The media has been declaring feminism finished for the past decade at least' (p. 18) while simultaneously 'other commentators want to stress the extent to which feminists have seized power over the way we think, suggesting conversely that feminism is alive and well successfully ruining our lives' (p. 19). Kat Banyard's *The Equality Illusion* (2010), itself published ten years after *Overloaded*, presents the backlash component of postfeminism as having altered in the intervening decade: the message is still that feminism is no longer relevant, but this time because 'we are "there" now [...] equality has been achieved' (Banyard, 2010, p. 2). This runs counter to the narratives of young women featured in *The Equality Illusion*, with body image especially prominent; as Banyard argues, 'scrutiny of "beauty" withered away during the 1990's and 2000's, only to be replaced by a rhetorical smokescreen of "choice" and "agency" supported not only by the beauty industry but some active in and writing on feminism' (p. 347). This discourse around "choice" and "agency" will be discussed in depth later in Chapter Eight.

As discussed earlier in this section, postfeminism is not monolithic, and criticisms of the backlash thesis have arisen from a feminist point of view, arguing that women's new agency is a real, potent force which should be celebrated rather than critiqued as a smokescreen, and that feminism is in danger of losing ground by conceding to a "victim"

position. Media scholar Catharine Lumby's *Bad Girls* (Lumby, 1997), an analysis of feminism and sexuality in late 1990's popular culture, argues that Faludi's work is simply a 'selective trawl' (p. xiii) and 'media bashing' (ibid) in which Faludi assumes the media audience are passive and incapable of engaging critically with what they see: 'The entire public, she assumes, is simply swept along in the wake of the latest media fad (everyone, that is, except feminists like herself who have miraculously found some high and dry moral ground from which to survey the resultant flood)' (ibid). Departing from the backlash specifically and engaging with the critiques of "empowered" femininity as a form of patriarchal control, Rene Denfeld's *The New Victorians* (1995) and Katie Roiphe's *The Morning After* (1993) both taking aim at the "moral high ground" Lumby speaks of, arguing that continued feminist critique is patronising, moralising and ultimately disempowers women, with Denfeld arguing that such approaches valorise 'political helplessness' (Denfeld 1995, p. 10) and place women in a 'morally pure yet helplessly martyred role' (ibid). Naomi Wolf's *Fire with Fire* (1993/2013), meanwhile, accepts that the backlash happened, but argues that it peaked and has been receding ever since *Backlash's* publication: 'The 1980's were the height of the backlash years, but from the autumn of 1991 to the present, a new era has begun' (Wolf, 2013, Introduction, para. 1). To Wolf, the backlash was 'an eminently rational, if intolerable, reaction to a massive and real threat' (Chapter 2, para. 3), a threat which, Wolf argues, ultimately won over the backlash, creating what she calls the "genderquake" in which patriarchal power, while it still dictates women's lives to a degree, is on the verge of collapse. All that is needed is for women to cease focusing on 'an identity of powerlessness' (Chapter 9, para. 3) promoted by mainstream feminism and instead become "power feminists"; individualistic and assertive women who focus on personal empowerment. It should be noted that *Fire with Fire* was itself harshly criticised for its portrayal of the



“genderquake”, with a 1994 review in the journal *Refractory Girl* calling *Fire with Fire* ‘a worthless confection of reactionary drivel’ (Fredericks, 1994, p. 13) and ‘an outright attempt to re-route the energies of young, privileged, first world women inclined to fight for equal rights, into strategies which pose no threat to the current economic and political system’ (p. 12).

While “TG” media is heavily informed by the backlash discourse discussed above, it is also a product of a broader postfeminist context. As Rosalind Gill, whose work on “sexual subjectification” will be discussed in length in Chapter 8 argues, it is reductive to ‘frame [postfeminist discourse] solely as backlash’ (Gill, 2017, p. 609) when postfeminism encompasses a ‘breadth of issues involved in feminist identification’ (p. 610). These include women’s presence in the workforce, the gendered nature of consumerism, and attitudes toward women’s sexual liberation, all of which will be addressed in Chapter 8. Another key aspect of postfeminist discourse is the ongoing “crisis of masculinity”, a phenomenon which runs deeply through “TG” media, and warrants its own separate discussion. Now that women have, ostensibly, moved into traditionally masculine spheres unimpeded, what is left for men to call their own?

### ‘Backlash Blockbusters’: Postfeminist Crises of Masculinity

As will be discussed in Chapter 5, almost all “TG” media protagonists in the project’s corpus (>92%) begin as heterosexual cisgender men before being transformed into women, and in longer narratives, this is often (>56%) accompanied by a shift in social position, from

negative to positive. For this reason, the discussion of postfeminism and the backlash will now shift from the ways in which reactionary discourses represented women as being hurt by feminism to the ways in which similar discourses represented feminism as harming men and boys. In the literature discussed in this section, men and boys are positioned as the victims of a “crisis of masculinity”, in which their identities have been destabilised, leaving them feeling directionless and redundant.

As Genz & Brabon (2009/2018) observe, the postfeminist “crisis of masculinity” is one of a series of ongoing crises, not a discrete phenomenon. As touched on in Chapter 3, the Second World War saw societies transformed in order to function with a diminished male workforce, which then attempted to return to tradition in the postwar period: ‘The traditional spheres of influence [...] had been redefined by the exodus of women from the home to the factory’ (Genz & Brabon 2009, p. 199), with men returning to a society ‘transformed by the need to function without them’ (ibid). The title of Heather Tirado-Gilligan’s article “It’s the End of Men. Again” expresses how frequent such crises are, noting that they have ‘cropped up repeatedly since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century’ (Gilligan, 2011), and are ‘most acute whenever there is an economic slowdown’ (ibid); there have, of course, been two major American recessions during the postfeminist period, in the early 1990s and late 2000’s. Given the postfeminist context of “TG”, this section will specifically engage with crisis literature produced during this period.

The anthology *Reaction and Resistance* (Chunn, Boyd & Lessard eds., 2007) deals broadly with contemporary manifestations of the backlash, with two essays in particular dealing with the reactionary claim that contemporary feminism is harming not only women,

but men. Dorothy Chunn's "Take it Easy, Girls": Feminism, Equality and Social Change in the Media' details a discourse in which 'feminists are critiqued both for disrupting the natural order of things [...] and for refusing to admit their success in the quest for equality and demanding even more of the societal pie' (Chunn, 2007, p. 31). Most importantly, this discourse frames feminists as 'advocates of reverse discrimination' (p. 45), a theme that becomes 'more pronounced in the late twentieth century when women were formally equal to men' (ibid). This is further detailed in the essay "Virtual Backlash" (Menzies, 2007, p. 68), which notes how the backlash has allowed men to position themselves as 'the subjugated, scapegoated and silenced victims of "politically correct" coalitions' (p. 68).

The most prevalent articulation of the backlash as "reverse sexist" anti-male discrimination is what Mills (2003) calls the 'backlash blockbusters' (Mills, 2003, p. 57), mainstream books which validate masculine anxiety by 'suggest[ing] that men and boys face comparable injustices and oppressions to those confronting women and girls – and hence, imply that feminism overstates the privileged positioning of men and boys within the current gender order' (p. 61). Among the more successful examples of these backlash blockbusters are Kathleen Parker's *Save the Males* (2010) and Christina Hoff-Summers' *The War Against Boys* (2000). In an echo of the backlash arguments identified by Faludi, Hoff-Summers claims that contemporary girls are 'both exalted and pitied' (Hoff-Summers, 2000, p. 18), creating a cycle in which 'the more girls are portrayed as diminished, the more boys are depicted as needing to be taken down a notch' (pp. 23 – 24), leading to ever-increasing attacks on boys; a "boy crisis". Likewise, *Save the Males* argues that 'boys [...] learn the lesson that would shadow them into adulthood: that they are unfairly privileged by virtue of their maleness, and they will be punished for it' (Parker, 2010, p. 5) while girls are 'coddled

and pampered into self-absorption' (p. 8). Parker's focus is broader than Hoff-Summers' focus on boys, arguing that a wave of feminist social engineering is 'Making men and women interchangeable [...] As long as we're all happy and having a good time – and taking our Prozac – we hardly notice the nausea that comes from being manipulated into behaving in ways that are for many unnatural' (p. 99), while feminists dominate contemporary discourse, with men who question feminist orthodoxy made to 'bite their tongues and pretend that what's false is true' (p. 115) for fear of being 'reprogrammed' (ibid).

The claim that contemporary men and boys feel increasingly directionless and insecure about their identity as men is not solely the purview of reactionaries. Feminist sociologist Lynne Segal observes in her book *Slow Motion* (1990) that 'From the sex-role theories of the fifties to the studies of gender and power in the eighties, the psychology of men has increasingly come to be seen as one fraught with strain and crisis' (Segal, 1990, p. x), and that men suffer under 'the weight of male tradition' (p. 26), with demands for stoicism and the inability to express weakness harming men psychologically and leading to increased risk of physical harm as well (ibid). While the gains of the feminist movement have played a part in destabilising male identity – 'confidence, ambition and creativity in women, are all forces that threaten the traditional sexual contract' (p. 59) – this is for the best, as breaking down gender roles is a positive step forward, in contrast to the reactionary claim that gender roles are natural and must be preserved.

Similarly, pro-feminist sociologist Michael Kimmel's book *Guyland* (2008) argues that young men's identity crises are the result of changing economic and social conditions at the turn of the millennium (something which also negatively impacted women; something

ignored by the reactionaries). Today's young men are 'anxious and uncertain' (Kimmel, 2008, p. 3) about their futures, in contrast to earlier generations of men; 'In another era, these guys would undoubtedly be [...] taking the first steps toward becoming the nation's future professionals [...] not today' (ibid). Raised with 'a privileged sense that you are special, that the world is there for you to take' (pp. 10 – 11), these young men have come of age in a world where their position is less stable, and where their economic role has shifted from (traditionally masculine) production to (traditionally feminine) consumption, meaning 'they feel smaller, less essential, less like real men' (p. 18). Kimmel is also critical of the argument, discussed above, that teaching boys to behave differently is an attack on their innate male nature, as it amounts to saying that 'Boys are such wild, predatory, aggressive animals that there is simply no point in trying to control them' (p. 72).

It is interesting to contrast this articulation of the backlash with some of the sex-change transformation-themed media discussed in Chapter 2. *Cleo / Leo*, *Switch* and *Dr Jekyll & Ms Hyde*, in particular, depict a traditionally male workplace being infiltrated by a woman who proceeds to take it over from helpless men who offer no resistance. In *Dr Jekyll & Ms Hyde*, the woman is explicitly an evil careerist who must be destroyed, but in both *Cleo / Leo* and *Switch* the woman also finds fulfilment in a heterosexual relationship, which *Switch* takes as far as the woman insisting on carrying a pregnancy – itself the result of a rape – through to full term, even though the consequences are likely to be fatal. Here, both aspects of the backlash are embodied: Women possess the power to take over a traditionally male position, but are also able to retain their identity as a woman by being traditionally feminine in other aspects of their lives. It is also notable that, in all three cases, the woman is able to completely deflect any institutional sexism they encounter through

either responding in an assertive manner or simply ignoring it, echoing Wolf's argument that the major obstacle to female power is women's own passivity, rather than patriarchy per se. Why the women must be transformed in to men, however, is something best explained by discussing another postfeminist discourse which occurs simultaneously to the backlash: The Men's Rights movement.

### 'Phallic Affect': The Men's Rights Movement

Another aspect of the backlash as discussed by Faludi is the rise of what became known as the Men's Rights movement, itself an outgrowth of what was known as the Men's Liberation movement, an attempt at feminist consciousness-raising among groups of men in the 1970's. As Segal (1990) discusses in *Slow Motion*, 'the new sex-role literature of the seventies [...] was primarily concerned with "the hazards of being male" [...] men were seen as conditioned into competitive, inexpressive, restrictive masculine roles which were both physically and psychically damaging [...] Men, too, needed liberating' (Segal, 1990, p. 68). From these Men's Liberation groups came author Warren Farrell, whose book *The Liberated Man* (1974) examined the harm done to men by patriarchy, much as the literature discussed by Segal (1990) did. However, Farrell would later turn against feminism, authoring a number of explicitly antifeminist books. As Faludi (1991/2006) writes, 'Within this literary camp of men's liberation, Farrell presided as the undisputed leader. He founded sixty "men's liberation" chapters of the National Organization for Women, was elected three times to NOW's New York City board, and was hailed in the Chicago Tribune as "the Gloria Steinem of Men's Liberation."' (Faludi, 1991/2006, p. 314). This was in the 1970's, however, and by

the time of *Backlash's* publication, Farrell had turned his back on feminism and begun to advocate for an acknowledgement of male, rather than female, powerlessness. Interviewed by Faludi for *Backlash* (1991/2006), Farrell does not acknowledge the backlash's existence, and instead focuses on the ways in which feminism has harmed men: 'Men are hurting more than women – that is, men are, in many ways, actually more powerless than woman now' (p. 311), claims Farrell to Faludi, 'The women's movement has turned out not to be a movement for equality but a movement for women's maximization of opportunities' (p. 312). 'In Farrell's new cosmos of oppressed and oppressors', writes Faludi, 'the most domineering are the independent women with good careers (p. 315).

At the time of *Backlash's* initial 1991 publication, Farrell had most recently published the 1986 book *Why Men Are The Way They Are*, and he would soon go on to publish the more successful *The Myth of Male Power* in 1993. In discussing *Why Men Are The Way They Are*, Faludi writes that 'among other things, [the book] takes feminism to task for "blaming" men for inequality and for encouraging women to focus excessively on their own independence' (Farrell, 1986/1988, p. 321). This train of thought is carried through into Farrell's *The Myth of Male Power*, in which women's career independence is presented as creating an unequal situation in which women can choose either a career or parenting role, while men are forced to always focus on their career: 'Today, when the successful single woman, they appear to be equals. But should they marry and consider children [...] a woman's choice to mother may hurt her career, but she can choose maternal opportunity or career continuity' (Farrell, 1993, p. 52). Throughout *The Myth of Male Power*, Farrell continually suggests equivalencies between male and female experiences in order to demonstrate that men are as disadvantaged, if not more so, than women. For example,

Farrell considers a man losing his job the male equivalent of a woman being raped, as a man who has recently lost his job is likely to 'feel humiliated, violated, helpless, angry...' (p. 173), and considers the draft the equivalent of government-enforced prostitution, culminating in Farrell describing contemporary women's situation as 'the corruptness of absolute power' (p. 358). This paranoid fear of women's agency, combined with a loathing of, yet dependence on, women's domestic and sexual role was earlier discussed by Eva Figs' (1970/1978) in her germinal book, *Patriarchal Attitudes*, in which she states that 'Man's vision of woman is [...] an uneasy combination of what he wishes her to be and what he fears her to be' (Figs, 1970/1978, p. 17). Reactions like the Men's Rights movement stem from 'the assumption that by trying to share male rights [women] somehow wanted to take them over altogether. Although in reality this attitude stems from a far deeper insecurity, and from the assumption that what one has always had must belong to one by right' (p. 29). Figs will be returned to later in this chapter when discussing the construction of femininity.

A survey of media from a Men's Rights perspective by Paul Nathanson & Katherine Young, *Spreading Misandry*, was published in 2001. *Spreading Misandry* begins with, as standard for backlash discourse, a desire to return to a "natural" gender order: 'There was a time – it is not easy now even to recall it – when people said of men and women: vive la difference [...] But the lingering difference is no longer celebrated' (Nathanson & Young, 2001, p. 49), which is ostensibly because 'feminists have convinced many people that women are somehow superior to men. For reasons of their own, even many men are convinced. That point of view is both reflected in and fostered by countless productions of popular culture' (p. 50). An example of this anti-male shift in popular culture, argue Nathanson & Young, is an increasing focus on female solidarity: the all-woman pop group



The Spice Girls, the woman-only music festival Lilith Fair, and the films *Waiting to Exhale*, *How to Make an American Quilt*, *Fried Green Tomatoes* and *Thelma & Louise*. While Nathanson & Young ensure us that 'There is nothing wrong with solidarity per se [...] The implication of many movies and television shows, for example, is that women do not or should not need men for any significant reason. Men are not necessarily evil, just superfluous' (p. 79). Other examples cited by Nathanson & Young include *The Simpsons* and *Home Improvement* treating male characters as comedic buffoons, and the use of a male monster in Disney's popular animated adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast*.

Pertinent to this project, *Spreading Misandry* contains one of the few lengthy analyses of aforementioned sex-transformation movie *Switch*, in the chapter "Demonising Men: The Devil is a Man". 'The premise of *Switch* [is] that heterosexual men are innately evil' (p. 30) and the male characters' 'crime is expressing erotic interest in women [...] what, precisely, is wrong with what [Steve] really wants?' (p. 31). Nathanson & Young also argue that the film's ending, in which Amanda is redeemed rather than Steve, represents women as possessing innate 'virtue' (p. 33) in contrast to male evil. However, the means of Amanda's redemption is adherence to traditional female roles, refusing a life-saving abortion and sacrificing themselves in order to carry a dangerous pregnancy through to full term.

The contemporary discourse around Men's Rights has flourished in online spaces; something this project considers relevant to "TG" media, given that the "TG" media itself is an online phenomenon. Menzies (2007) describes the online Men's Rights discourse as being a 'torrent of diatribes, invectives, atrocity tales, claims to entitlement, calls to arms,

and prescriptions for change in the service of [...] all things non-feminist' (Menzies, 2007, p. 65), in particular erroneous claims that domestic violence is initiated and perpetrated by women as often, or more often, than men. In Dragiewicz's (2011) study of Men's Rights groups, *Equality With a Vengeance*, these groups appropriate liberal feminist language of equality and inclusivity to justify themselves. Returning to the domestic violence issue, for example, Dragiewicz notes that 'In everyday discourse, when men are implicitly at the center, gender is not mentioned [...] In effect, including gender means including women. The implication of insisting that domestic violence is a human rather than a gender issue is that paying attention to gender means paying attention to women' (Dragiewicz, 2011, p. 21).

Michael Kimmel's *Angry White Men* (2013) discusses the movement more broadly than Dragiewicz, describing the contemporary Men's Rights discourse as 'a virtual social movement. I don't mean that they are "virtually" a movement – as in, "almost, but not quite." I mean that organize virtually, that their social movement organization is a virtual organisation [...] They troll cyberspace, the anti-PC police, ready to attack any blogger, columnist or quasi liberal who dares say something which they disagree' (Kimmel, 2013, p. 37). 'To hear them tell it, white men in America are steamrollered into submission, utterly hopeless and powerless. They're failed patriarchs, deposed kings, not only the "biggest losers" but also the sorest' (p. 118).

These men's 'soreness' is given an in-depth analysis in Jonathan A Allan's article "Phallic Affect, or Why Men's Right Activists Have Feelings" (Allan, 2016). Rather than specifically deal with the movement's politics and activism, which have been done elsewhere, Allan's article focuses on the ways in which 'Men's rights intellectuals, in their

attempts to save maleness and masculinity, insist upon and deploy the language of affect [...] demonstrating that they are angry and fearful, and it would seem that other affects are simply not an option. Do men experience joy? Certainly not if one reads through men's rights writings' (Allan, 2016, p. 24). Delving further into the central claims of Men's Rights intellectuals, Allan finds them incoherent and riddled with contradictions; 'though the men's rights movement is fundamentally and constitutionally homosocial, the movement itself is [...] rabidly homophobic. None of this, of course, makes sense' (p. 27). Faced with this incoherence, Allan argues that what is central to the Men's Rights movement is how men feel: 'I do not believe it is an accident that White men are turning to affective utterances to mark their claims [...] even if quantitative, qualitative and factual research demonstrates that the apparent cause of these affects is incorrect, wrong, misguided, we can still not deny the veracity of the affect' (p. 28). This focus on personal feelings of grievance which, being feelings, cannot be denied to exist, is relevant to "TG" media. As will be discussed when this project begins engaging directly with "TG" media, fantasy scenarios which bear no relationship to real-world sexual politics appear frequently; A nude woman trapped and surrounded by a gang of naked men is represented as in control of the situation in *Temazcal* (Kannel, 2014a), "Ladies' Night" drink discounts – a preoccupation of some Men's Rights Activists, which will be further detailed in Chapter 7 – are rendered as the exclusion of men from public spaces in *Rave New World* (Smooch, 2009), adolescent girls are represented as not suffering any personal problems in *A Midwinter Fantasy* (Mentalcrash, 2012), and so on, while men are represented as powerless and victimised.

This suggests that "TG" media is constructing scenarios that represent the feelings of aggrieved men; an idea that will be developed further when this project begins engaging

with “TG” media in depth. Another victim of such representations are trans\* people, whose lives are, likewise, often presented negatively, based on transphobic, homophobic and misogynist stereotypes. A discussion of literature pertinent to the portrayal of trans\* characters will now follow.

### ‘A Politically and Ethically More Acceptable Target’: The Use of Trans\* Characters as Reactionary Metaphors

This section of the literature review will discuss the ways in which trans\* characters are represented in visual media, and will draw on four analyses of trans\* characters in contemporary visual media. Phillips’ (2006) study of trans\* representation in visual media, and Ryan’s (2009) PhD thesis, which similarly focused on trans\* media representation. This will be supplemented by two journal articles on trans\* representation; Jones’s (2006) article focusing on the musical comedy film *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, and Lueng’s (2005) article on a trans\* character in the *wuxia* (fantasy martial arts) film *Swordsman II*. These four works were chosen due to their specific engagement with the use of trans\* characters as reactionary metaphors in stories aimed at a mainstream cisgender audience. This is consistent with “TG” media texts, which – as Chapter 5 will demonstrate – have little to no interest in the lives of actual trans\* people, even fictional ones, but do frequently engage with the anxieties of cisgender, heterosexual men.

Beginning with the work of Phillips and Ryan, Phillips (2006) notes that mainstream interest in trans\* characters in fiction has been common since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and began

to peak in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup>, which Phillips credits to the postmodern collapse of the “grand narratives” of sex and gender (Phillips, 2006, p. 2), spurred on in part by the development of medical technologies in the postwar period which allowed for surgery and hormone treatments to become more widely available. Both Phillips and Ryan conclude that the mainstream media portrayal of trans\* characters is largely confined to a small number of reactionary stereotypes. These recurring stereotypes promulgate three broad reactionary assumptions about trans\* people; that they are being deceptive with regard to their “real” (assigned) sex, that they are amusing objects of ridicule and, if not ridiculous, they are psychologically unstable and dangerous. These three assumptions will be discussed, in order to later compare and contrast them with the depiction of characters in “TG” media.

Engaging firstly with the reactionary representation of trans\* characters as engaged in acts of deception, Phillips (2006) observes that ‘The theme of deception is a central and recurring one in both ancient and modern representations of transgender’ (Phillips, 2006, p. 19), and identifies two models of deception in trans\* narratives, hinging on the audience’s relationship to the deception. In the first model, the story’s characters and audience are unaware of a character’s “real” sex, which is then revealed, ‘followed by the pleasure [for the audience] associated with discovery’ (ibid). In the second model, the audience are aware of the deception taking place, and ‘here derives pleasure from observing the deception’s success or failure’ (ibid). The reliance on shock and discovery makes the first models more suited to dramas and thrillers, such as *The Crying Game* and *Psycho* while the audience “playing along” with what they know to be a deception is more suited to comedies like *Tootsie* and *Mrs Doubtfire*. Ryan is in agreement with Phillips, identifying a trans\* character archetype she terms “The Deceiver”, likewise highlighting *Tootsie* and *Mrs*

*Doubtfire* as prime examples, and focuses on the likely impact of such characters, even when presented comedically: 'these films [...] function to reinforce the already-circulating a stereotype' (Ryan, 2009, p. 63) in which 'the transgender body, which mixes signifiers [of sex and gender] is hegemonically constructed as always already deceptive' (p. 65). Furthermore, those narratives in which the "deceptive" character is not killed depicts them returning to their original lives, restoring a heteronormative order after a temporary transgression. Ryan also notes that these depictions elide the need for trans\* characters to "pass" in order to be recognised as the gender they are expressing; in a discussion of the film *To Wong Foo*, in which the physically hypermasculine action movie star Wesley Snipes disguises himself as a woman, Ryan observes that 'males dressed as women are universally accepted and regarded as female [...] Because these [drag] queens ostensibly "look like" women, dominant logic insists they are also biologically female' (Ryan, 2009 p. 135).

The remaining trans\* archetypes identified by Phillips and Ryan prove less applicable to "TG" media, but will be discussed briefly. Phillips notes that the use of trans\* characters in comedy, such as the "deceptive" narratives discussed above, also functions as a means of rendering homophobic humour palatable to audiences who would otherwise consider it unacceptable; the mockery of men behaving in unmasculine ways is 'rendered politically correct by being displaced onto the act of transvestism [...] a politically and ethnically more acceptable target' (Phillips, 2006 p. 52). Ryan (2009) makes a similar argument, identifying the frequent use of trans\* characters as nonthreatening comic relief members of a film's supporting cast. This archetype she terms "The Mammy", 'a subordinated minority subject that conforms to the desires of the dominant class' (Ryan, 2009, p. 128). These trans\* characters are depicted 'as clowns and as walking stereotypes' (p. 166), defined by

‘innocuous sassiness, wittiness and stereotyped language usage’ (ibid), echoing earlier depictions of homosexual men. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, such stereotypes – both homosexual and trans\* - are almost entirely absent from “TG” media.

Phillips and Ryan both also discuss the reactionary portrayal of trans\* characters as inherently dangerous, with the characters’ inability to embody gender “correctly” used as metaphor for psychological instability and monstrosity. As this project argues that “TG” media uses sexual transformation as a metaphor, this is worth considering, although “TG” protagonists themselves do not resemble those discussed here. Phillips (2006) explicitly identifies these as ‘the dark underside’ (Phillips, 2006, p. 85) of the comedic portrayals discussed earlier, with the “ridiculous” and “scary” aspects of trans\* characters functioning as two sides of the same reactionary coin. Even the films *Psycho* and *Silence of the Lambs*, which make a point of explicitly stating on screen that their murderous villains are not “really” a transvestite and a trans woman, respectively, still reproduce this discourse “by association if not by definition’ (Phillips, 2006, pp. 84-85), using their gender non-conformity as a symptom. Ryan (2009) concurs, noting ‘a long line of films that have presented gender-variance in proximity to psychotic and homicidal behaviors’ (Ryan, 2009, p. 177), naming this trans\* archetype “The Monster”. Ryan notes that, historically, what is considered “monstrous” is what crossed between stable boundaries, such as living/dead or human/animal, and thus audiences already ‘accustomed to human-animal hybrid monsters or outrageous Godzilla movies’ (Ryan, 2009, p. 180) can find a fresher kind of horror in the monstrosity of a character who breaks down gender boundaries. Phillips also quotes from Garber’s *Vested Interests* (1992/2011), which will be discussed in the following section. While *Vested Interests* is primarily concerned with cross-dressing, Garber does note the

association between monstrosity and physical transformation in cinema that deals with transsexual characters, with the horror arising from 'the public's fears about crossing these forbidden boundaries [...] moving the focus of attention from the mind to the body' (as quoted by Phillips, 2006, p. 95). To Phillips, the bodies of trans\* people 'threaten the notion of fixed and specific sexual orientations' (Phillips, 2006, p. 149), which is monstrous, but also an object of erotic fascination.

Phillips (2006) notes that "'trannie" porn is said to be the fastest growing type of pornography on the Internet and DVD markets' (Phillips, 2006, p. 2) before dedicating a later chapter to the objectification of trans\* people in pornography. Phillips highlights that 'the overwhelming majority of transsexual models represented in Internet pornography [...] have retained their male genitals, greatly enhancing their erotic appeal' (Phillips, 2006, p. 149), here referring specifically to pornography featuring trans\* performers (both trans women and cross-dressing men) who present as women before later revealing their penises. Phillips notes that such "trannie" pornography follows the same patterns as the mainstream cinema narratives discussed earlier, with 'the tension between concealing and revealing' (p. 154) functioning as a source of pleasure for the audience. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 5, "TG" media demonstrates almost zero interest in the erotic nature of a trans\* body, with only three narratives in the corpus (<1%) featuring erotic scenes involving women with penises, and a further three (<1%) featuring eroticised cross-dressing.

Another critique of the use of trans\* bodies as a metaphor in mainstream media is raised by Jones's (2006) analysis of the 2001 musical comedy film *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* tells the story of Hedwig, a young gay man who falls in love



with another man, and seeks sexual reassignment surgery in order that they can be legally married. However, the operation is botched, leaving Hedwig with an inch of penis remaining – the “angry inch” of the title. From this point on, Hedwig identifies as a trans woman, though she is described – in the words of the film’s official synopsis on Amazon.com – ‘less than a man, but not quite a woman’.<sup>5</sup> While Hedwig differs from the more negative examples discussed by Ryan and Phillips, in that Hedwig is not depicted as deceptive or dangerous, Jones nevertheless finds the film guilty of using trans\* existence as simply a metaphor for ‘a gay male rite of passage narrative, one that uses the figure of the transsexual to represent the path not taken – because it is the wrong path’ (Jones, 2006, p. 465), with Hedwig’s story culminating in the rejection of their trans\* identity. Jones considers this appropriation of transgender as simply a metaphor for a homosexual man’s failure to understand his sexual identity ‘a trespass at best, and at worst a theft’ (p. 464). *While Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, with its openly gay and trans\* characters, is far from the heteronormativity of the films criticised by Ryan and Philips, is it still notable that trans\* is used as a metaphor for the main character’s sexual confusion rather than depicted as a genuine identity.

Literature on the kind of ‘magical’ transformations that permeate “TG” proves harder to locate. Nathanson & Young’s review of *Switch* was cited earlier, and interprets the main character’s transformation as an anti-male narrative in which only women are offered the possibility of redemption. Ryan’s *Reel Gender* does briefly mention the fantasy film *A Florida Enchantment*, in which a woman becomes a man after eating a seed from a magical

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.amazon.com/Hedwig-Angry-Inch-Line-Platinum/dp/B00005QW5X>

tree, but Ryan does not offer an in-depth analysis of the film, as she is concerned with the depiction of trans\* characters who are, if only hypothetically, realistic. A more in-depth analysis of a “magical” sex change is offered in Helen Hok-Sze Leung’s “Unsung Heroes: Reading Transgender Subjectivities in Hong Kong Action Cinema” (2005), which deals in part with the character Dongfang Bubai, a villainous swordsman who initially appeared in a fantasy novel before becoming a recurring villain in a series of films. Bubai debuts in the novel *The Smiling, Proud Wanderer*, in which he is depicted as a man who has castrated himself as part of a magical ritual through which he gains superhuman martial arts skills. However, when the novel was adapted into a film almost thirty years later, *Swordsman II*, Bubai’s depiction was drastically altered: Rather than the ritual emasculating Bubai and leaving him a eunuch, the ritual is depicted as having physically transformed Bubai into a beautiful and alluring woman. Leung notes two ways in which the change in Bubai’s presentation, from a eunuch to a woman, alters the representation of sexuality in the narrative. Firstly, the depiction of Bubai’s transformed body as sexually desirable rather than repulsive demonstrates changing Chinese attitudes towards homosexuality, which was illegal at the time of the novel’s original publication (while their new body is female, Bubai is still presented as a man transgressing against their “natural” place). Secondly, and substantially more relevant to “TG” media, Leung notes that changing Bubai from a castrated man to a woman ultimately downplays the potentially subversive trans\* aspects of the character. Rather than occupying a space that is neither a stable male identity or a stable female identity, Bubai now *exchanges* a stable male identity for a stable female identity, leaving gender roles intact.

Two of Leung's observations are especially relevant to "TG" media. Firstly, the way in which *Swordsman II* associates Bubai's transformation from male to female with the acquisition of supernatural powers. This will become relevant later on, as one of the more common "TG" narratives encountered in this project is that of a male character who must become female in order to harness supernatural powers, so it is notable that literature on this trope exists outside of "TG" media (this is also the origin of the protagonist of the comic *Mantra*, as discussed in Chapter 2). Secondly, and more importantly, Leung observes that, while it may initially seem counter-intuitive, Bubai's transformation from male to female serves to make the character *more* heteronormative and *less* of a disruptive force. Rather than dealing with the non-normative castrated male body of Bubai in the original novel, *Swordsman II* has the character exchange a heteronormative male identity for a heteronormative female identity. The later content analysis of "TG" media will demonstrate a near-total absence of LGBT characters and characters whose bodies are non-heteronormative, making this observation about Bubai's shift from one stable identity to another, rather than occupying the space in between, pertinent to the kinds of transformations appearing in "TG" media.

### 'The Physical Penis Was Not A Social Penis': Cross-Dressing & Cultural Genitals

The topic of cross-dressing has already been discussed above with reference to Ryan and Philips' broader discussion of trans\* portrayal, with both in agreement that cross-dressing men were overwhelmingly portrayed as deceptive and/or comedic for the entertainment of a heteronormative audience. As discussed in the earlier review of

*Metamorphose.org*, “TG” media is actively disinterested in cross-dressing, instead telling stories about characters whose physical bodies are transformed; something which will be confirmed in Chapter 5’s analysis of the project’s corpus of “TG” media. As with the portrayal of trans\* characters, however, there is still value in looking at “TG” media with a greater understanding of this literature. The literature discussed below was chosen because, like the trans\* literature discussed above, it focuses on the ways in which cross-dressing is used a device in fiction in order to make statements about sex and gender, rather than attempts at the realistic representations of characters who cross-dress. Before discussing cross-dressing in fiction, however, this section will first discuss “cultural genitals”, a concept which aids in understanding how these cross-dressing characters are interpreted, and can also be applied to some of the trans\* characters discussed above.

As noted above, the “TG” media analysed in this project has little interest in cross-dressing, focusing instead on complete physical transformation. This centrality of the social and interactive elements of biological sex and gender can be understood through Kessler & McKenna’s (1985) concept of “cultural genitals”. As Kessler & McKenna articulate the concept, the basis of our interactions with each other are built upon our understanding of people as assumed to be male or female. The difference between male and female, according to the people surveyed by Kessler & McKenna, is in the genitals they possess. This, however, reveals a paradox, in that we rarely see the genitals of the people we assign a gender to: ‘since in initial interactions genitals are rarely available for inspection, this clearly is not the evidence actually used’ (Kessler & McKenna, 1985, p. ix). Kessler & McKenna’s explanation is that we base our judgement on ‘attributed genitals’ (p. 154), which ‘are constructed out of our ways to envisioning gender and *always* exist in everyday interactions’

(ibid), rather than the genitals the person we are interacting with physically possesses; ‘if the genital is not present in a physical sense, it exists in a cultural sense if the person [...] is assumed to have it’ (ibid).

Kessler & McKenna later cite the case of a trans woman who, prior to genital surgery, had had sexual encounters with men who did not consider themselves gay. As Kessler & McKenna report, ‘These men did not treat the (physical) penis between her legs as a (social) penis. They seemed to have decided that it was “all right” that Janet appeared to have an inappropriate physical genital because they had already decided the genital had no reality in a cultural sense’ (ibid). As will be demonstrated later in the content analysis of “TG” media, only a minority of “TG” media narratives have any interest in physical genitalia, and a good deal of “TG” media goes so far as emphasise to their audience that nudity and sexual material will not be present - yet these same “TG” narratives still hinge on the transformation of a character’s sex. By looking at these transformations as primarily transformations of cultural genitals, rather than physical ones, “TG” media can be better understood. This focus on the social meaning of bodily sex will inform the project’s analysis overall, but for now it will be applied it to literature on cross-dressing – if “TG” media is about the social and cultural inversion of sex, rather than the physical then, provided the character is socially accepted as the sex they are presenting, physical transformation of the body is not necessary.

Key texts here are Victoria Flanagan’s *Into the Closet* (2007), an analysis of the representation of cross-dressing in young adult and children’s fiction, as well as Marjorie Garber’s *Vested Interests* (1992/2011), which deals with the broader topic of cross-dressing.

Given Flanagan's emphasis on fictional portrayals, a better fit for my analysis of "TG" media, this section is more heavily weighted towards her analysis than Garber's. Flanagan finds that the representation of male-to-female cross-dressing and female-to-male cross-dressing are sharply differentiated, both in terms of their representation and in terms of the role that cross-dressing plays in the narrative. In Flanagan's analysis, girls and young women who cross-dress and are taken as male are depicted as being liberated by the experience, attaining a masculine subjectivity, and the agency that comes with it. As Flanagan, along with the wider corpus of feminist literature points out, masculine subjectivity *is* subjectivity; see especially Beauvoir's observation in *The Second Sex* that 'the world itself is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confused with absolute truth' ( Beauvoir, 1949/1997, p. 175). Cross-dressed female characters also frequently prove their competence by out-performing "real" men at traditionally masculine tasks. In contrast to this, boys and young men who cross-dress are depicted as being constrained and humiliated by the requirements of femininity, incapable of performing in a convincingly feminine way, and completely incompetent at traditionally feminine tasks. Rather than the empowering narratives surrounding female cross-dressing, male cross-dressing is depicted in broadly comedic terms, with the comedy arising from both the male character's humiliation and his inability to behave in a convincingly feminine way.

Flanagan argues that both of these contrasting approaches valorise masculinity over femininity. In the case of cross-dressing female characters, their competence and success is measured by how well they perform at masculine tasks – masculinity being the benchmark by which a person is judged. This is in line with Margaret Thornton's concept of the 'benchmark man', a standard of white, heterosexual masculinity against which all people

are judged. Summarised by Chowdery (1997), the women are 'expected to show docility and deference while being as competent as men [...] committing themselves to masculinist work practices [...] As soon as a woman "deviates" from the accepted norm [...] she is cast as "Other"' (pp. 243-244). In the cases of cross-dressing male characters, their failure to perform femininity is depicted as proof that their masculinity is so 'inescapably potent' (Flanagan, 2007, p. 140) that it is literally impossible for them to convincingly play a feminine role.

Garber's analysis of female cross-dressers gaining agency where male ones do not is broadly similar to Flanagan's, but touches on something that is relevant to "TG" comics use of physical transformation rather than cross-dressing. Where Flanagan observes a potent masculinity in male bodies that cannot be subsumed through feminine dress and mannerism, Garber focuses on the role of the female body in cross-dressing. Masculinity, argues Garber, is constructed actively through a man's actions, and this is why audiences find it acceptable for a cross-dressing woman to, as long as nobody else is *aware* of the cross-dressing, play the role of a man; what matters is that she proves herself adept at masculine tasks. Femininity, Garber argues, is opposed to this in that it is supposedly rooted in the body, rather than in behaviour. A woman's femininity is not created through her actions, but through her body's development of sexual characteristics during puberty, and then by becoming the object of actions from men; Garber describes the distinction in terms of masculinity being "made" while femininity "becomes". These assumptions about the ontology of gender will be discussed in the following section of this chapter.

## 'They go along, they mime': Ontologies of Gender

While not dealing with cross-dressing as a topic, Sherry Ortner's classic article "Is Female-to-Male as Nature is to Culture?" (Ornter, 1974) makes a similar point about femininity to that of Garber; that culture considers femininity to be a natural essence residing in women's bodies, while masculinity is something which must be actively constructed. An attempt to explain how it can simultaneously be that 'The secondary status of women in society is one of the few universals' (p. 67) while 'the specific cultural conceptions and symbolizations of women are extraordinarily diverse and even mutually contradictory' (ibid), Ortner seeks to 'expose the underlying logic of [this] cultural thinking' (p. 68). Rejecting biological determinist explanations for female subordination as unsatisfactory, Ornter argues that this subordination occurs because women are associated with the natural world rather than with culture and civilisation, which are associated with men. Because our culture and civilisation view themselves as attempts to transcend nature by subjugating it, the subjugation of women follows: 'Since it is always culture's project to subsume and transcend nature, if women were considered part of nature, then culture would find it "natural" to subordinate, not to say oppress, them' (p. 73). That femininity was constructed by men to serve the needs of men is also a central theme of Eva Figes' *Patriarchal Attitudes* (1970/1978), which begins with the statement that 'women have largely been man-made' (Figes, 1970/1978, p. 15); femininity was created by men, 'not by men and women jointly for common ends, not by women for themselves, but by men' (p.17). Figes will be returned to later in this section, while Ortner's conceptualisation of women as associated with the natural world, along with theories of female "monstrosity" contrasted with male rationality, will be a key theme of Chapter 9.



These culturally-constructed “common sense” attitudes towards masculinity and femininity are a recurring theme in “TG” media, and have long been criticised as tautologies and self-fulfilling prophecies. Returning first to Segal’s *Slow Motion* (1990), Segal demonstrates how early attempts to understand people’s relationship to gender took these assumptions as read: ‘Not surprisingly, psychologists confirmed the ubiquity of gender stereotypes [...] by requiring subjects to choose between polarised masculine/feminine, rough/gentle, etc. stereotype self-descriptions’ (Segal, 1990, p. 66). Gauging how closely people identify with these stereotypes ‘bring us no nearer to understanding anything about people’s anxiety, tension, comfort or delight in their experiences as masculine or feminine’ (p. 67), and we only learn what we already assumed to be true, ‘people seem to feel there are or ought to be differences between the sexes; sometimes they themselves fit the stereotypes and sometimes they don’t’ (ibid). Ultimately, ‘what is postulated is some essential, pre-social “self”, which must presumably be biological, or, alternatively, a merely mystic presence’ (p. 68). This tension around the “nature” of gender leads into discussing the work of Judith Butler.

As articulated in *Gender Trouble* (1990/1999), Butler’s analysis views gender itself as a ‘regulatory fiction’ (Butler, 1990/1999, p. 43) that is ‘produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self’ (p. 179). In this way, gender is produced ‘*on the surface* of the body’ (p. 173), which creates ‘the effect of an internal core or substance’ (ibid) we think of as gender, although as no such “internal” substance exists, gender’s ontology is revealed to be tautological: ‘That the

gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality [...] in other words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core' (p. 173).

Butler's argument that gender is created through behaviour is often misunderstood, so it should be stressed that it is not intended to suggest that humans have complete freedom to alter their gender expression. Rather, Butler argues that our cultural understanding of "masculine" and "feminine" as essential qualities of selves severely limits our possibilities for expression, as they are products of a patriarchal and heterosexist system of power: 'the power regimes of heterosexism and phallogocentrism seek to augment themselves through a constant repetition of their logic, their metaphysic, and their naturalized ontology' (p. 42), so we are limited to gender expressions which 'support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power' (p. 44) in order to sustain the appearance of these power regimes as legitimate. It is for this reason that Butler terms gender "performative" rather than "performance", as the latter implies a degree of freedom and playfulness largely absent from gender expression under patriarchy. Indeed, these repetitions become so mundane that 'the actors themselves come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief' (p. 179). This is the 'strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities [...] outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality' (p. 180). Similar concerns appear in Kimmel's *Guyland* (2008), cited earlier, in which Kimmel discusses the ways in which masculinity is created through behaviour in such a way that it becomes repressive and self-regulating: 'Every mannerism, every movement contains a coded gender language. What happens if you refuse or resist? What happens if you step outside the definition of

masculinity?’ (Kimmel, 2008, p. 48). Thus, men and boys function as their own ‘gender police’ (p. 47), demanding either conformity or stigmatisation. Though Kimmel does not explicitly cite Butler, his explicit description of masculinity as a performance designed to suggest a non-existent inner nature mirrors her work; men and boys ‘struggle to conceal their own sense of fraudulence [...] they go along, they mime’ (Kimmel, 2008, p. 7). This will prove relevant to the later discussion of “TG” media texts, which display an understanding of gender mired in contradiction: Femininity is represented as something natural which exists in complementary harmony with masculinity, yet masculinity *itself* is represented as a perilous, stifling performance with no authenticity, leaving men feeling like frauds.

Pertinent to the literature discussed in this chapter, Butler (1990/1999) uses drag performances to demonstrate the performative nature of gender, as the appeal of drag performances is that gender is explicitly being *superficially* imitated – and, in doing so, ‘*drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself*’ (p. 175, emphasis in original). What drag is parodying, Butler argues, is not an “original” gender, but ‘the very notion of an original [...] an imitation without an origin’ (ibid). However, Phillips (2006), cited earlier in this chapter, takes issue with Butler’s positivity towards drag, arguing that Butler’s own personal interpretation is not that of the typical audience for drag performances are intended. To Phillips, drag is ‘a male joke for other men [that] reinforces gender polarity through caricature and excess’ (Phillips, 2006, p. 129), its portrayal of femininity ‘ironic rather than sympathetic’ (ibid), recalling the arguments made by Figs (1970/1978), cited earlier, that femininity was created by and for men, and exists to subordinate women. This is suggestive of reactionary arguments around trans\* ontology, which is the next subject for discussion.

As will be demonstrated in Chapter 5, “TG” media has little to no interest in trans\* subjectivities and is overwhelmingly concerned with the experiences of cisgender, heterosexual men, yet still appropriates trans\* terminology, explicitly describing its narratives and characters with words like “transgender” and “transsexual”. In order to further develop the project’s understanding of “TG” media’s approach to representing trans\* narratives and characters from a cisgender standpoint, the final section of this chapter will engage with other “outsider” analysis of trans\* ontology. As will be discussed later in this section, these analyses have been harshly critiqued and rejected; their utility to this project is that the problematic, reactionary and simplistic assumptions made about trans\* ontology and subjectivity resonate with similar assumptions underpinning “TG” media, in particular the assumption that a trans woman’s subjectivity is “really” a cisgender male subjectivity in a female body.

Janice Raymond’s *The Transsexual Empire* (Raymond, 2006/1979), argues that trans women’s experiences are ultimately always male experiences and thus identified with patriarchy, rather than women’s liberation; a trans woman ‘is a man, and *not* a woman encumbered by the scars of patriarchy that are unique to women’s personal and social history’ (Raymond, 2006, p. 133, emphasis in original). Furthermore, Raymond argues that, as trans women remain identified with patriarchal interests, they make for “better” women, being more compliant with feminine submission than cisgender women. Trans women ‘can play our parts [...] better than we can play them ourselves [...] as is often the case with the male-to-constructed-female transsexual who appears more feminine than most feminine women’ (ibid). Sheila Jeffreys’ more recent *Gender Hurts* (Jeffreys, 2014) makes similar

arguments, and draws explicitly upon Raymond's work. To Jeffreys, the validation of trans\* identity is inherently reactionary as it 'cannot exist without a notion of essential "gender" [...] founded on stereotypes and recognised as being in contradiction to the interests of women' (Jeffreys, 2014, p. 19). Echoing Raymond, Jeffreys also argues that trans women are identified with, and invested in, patriarchy, readily choosing to play by its rules rather than fighting against it: 'Men have been adjudicating on what women are, and how they should behave, for millennia [...] transgenderism on the part of men can be seen as a ruthless appropriation of women's experience and existence' (pp. 24 – 25).

Raymond and Jeffreys' work has come under substantial criticism. *The Transsexual Empire* is the focus of Carol Riddell's article "Divided Sisterhood", published in *The Transgender Studies Reader* immediately following the excerpt from Raymond's book. Riddell notes Raymond's characterisation of trans women as 'highly stereotypical [...] propagandists for male-defined images of women' (Riddell, 2006, p. 147), something which denies trans\* people 'any sense of personal identity at all [...] turn[s] them into the passive agents of sexist manipulators' (p. 152). Most importantly, 'Nowhere in her book does Ms. Raymond give any account of trans-sexual life experience [...] The only place she gives any information about these [trans\*] individuals is in the section which shows that trans-sexual women conform to sexual stereotypes' (ibid), demonstrating Raymond's epistemological approach disregards the standpoint of trans\* people, something it has in common with "TG" media.

The depiction of trans\* ontology in Jeffreys' *Gender Hurts* has likewise been criticised as too simplistic, especially with regard to Jeffreys' reductionist understanding of gender as a "social construct". As Kelly Hunnings' review in the journal *Rocky Mountain Review* points

out, 'it is widely recognised that gender is, in itself, socially constructed, but transgenderism is [...] a biological, genetic or sometimes purely performed upheaval of [...] binary gender performances' (Hunnings, 2015, p. 280). This is echoed by Amy Stone's review in *Contemporary Sociology*, arguing that 'Just because these identities are socially constructed does not mean that individuals developing essentializing or biological narratives about their identities are illegitimate' (Stone, 2016, p. 202), using the example that 'many gay and lesbian individuals narrate their own identities as immutable or biological, and scholars have no issue reconciling these narratives with studies demonstrating the socially constructed nature of homosexuality' (ibid). Stone likens Jeffrey's approach to gender's status as "social construct" to that of 'the ex-gay movement [who] often use scholarship on sexual fluidity and social constructionism to argue that homosexuality can be changed' (ibid). Stone is also critical of *Gender Hurts* for, as with *The Transsexual Empire*, ignoring trans\* voices. *Gender Hurts* relies on interviews with people exclusively 'found through online networks critical of transgender lives and subjectivities' (p. 201), leading to a work that is 'unsystematic and biased' (ibid).

Trans\* theorist and performance artist Sandy Stone's 1987 essay "The *Empire Strikes Back*" directly addresses Raymond's work from a trans\* standpoint, though is itself critical of the trans\* representation which existed contemporaneously with Raymond. Discussing accounts of trans women, such as *Man into Woman* (Hoyer 1933), '[T]hese authors replicate the stereotypical male account of the constitution of woman: Dress, makeup, and delicate fainting [...] If there is any intervening space in the continuum of sexuality, it is invisible [...]' No wonder feminist theorists have been suspicious. Hell, *I'm suspicious*'. (Stone, 2006/1987, p. 227). Compared to scientific studies of trans\* people at the time of writing, Raymond's

work is 'no less totalizing' (p. 232) despite its 'egregious and inexcusable bigotry' (ibid): 'There are no subjects in these [scientific studies], only homogenized, totalized objects' (ibid). Stone's critique of trans\* discourse which focuses on trans\* people exchanging one stable gender identity for another, rather than destabilising the categories themselves, is pertinent to "TG" media, which deals almost exclusively with these ostensibly stable categories, and is heavily invested in male and masculinist accounts of womanhood.

When discussing "TG" media's construction of masculinity, it is important to stress its relationality with femininity. As Segal (1990), quoted earlier, summarises, 'To be "masculine" is *not* to be "feminine", *not* to be "gay", *not* to be tainted with any marks of "inferiority"' (Segal, 1990 p. xi), and observes that much early research into masculinity presupposed 'polarised masculine/feminine, rough/gentle, etc.' (p. 66) oppositions to be innate. Ornter's (1974) highly influential early account of gender oppositionality, discussed in more detail in Chapter 9, argues that masculinity *is* human culture, setting itself apart from a symbolic feminine 'nonhuman realm' (Ornter, 1974 p. 71). Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* (2011/1978), notes that identification with masculinity-as-what-is-not-femininity happens during early development, when 'a boy represses those qualities he takes to be feminine inside himself, and rejects and devalues [...] whatever he considers to be feminine' (Chodorow, 2011, p. 356). Raewyn Connell's *Masculinities* (1995/2005), which deals with both masculine ontology and the way in which masculinity has evolved historically, is of importance here. What is immediately relevant historically is the way in which, like Ornter, Connell shows how male and female were, historically, defined as superior and inferior beings, with women excluded from masculine spheres on the basis of their innate inferiority. Like earlier feminist thinkers such as Beauvoir (second sex) and

Irigaray (sex that is not one), Carol Gilligan, discussed at length in Chapter 8, writes in *In A Different Voice* (1982) how this exclusion of women led to the masculine becoming seen as the universal default, with the feminine devalued and othered, leaving us with 'a limitation in the conception of the human condition, an omission of certain truths about life' (Gilligan, 1982, p. 2). It was not until relatively recently that the cultural focus shifted from this to the concept of "separate but equal", in which men and women are seen as having different capabilities, and thus belonging in separate spheres due to these innate differences. This is already suggestive of "TG" media's approach, as well as some of the more recent sex-change transformation media cited earlier, with transformed male characters entering into previously unavailable feminine social spheres.

Connell's most significant contribution is the "Hegemonic Masculinity" model of masculinity, which recognises that there is no single static "masculinity", but instead a series of hegemonic forms which vary from environment to environment. Drawing on the Marxist Antonio Gramsci's analysis of relations between classes, the purpose of the "hegemonic" form of masculinity is to embody what is currently 'culturally exalted [...] the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy' (Connell, 2005, p. 77); a "dominant" form of masculinity. Those who bear hegemonic masculinity are not necessarily the most powerful men in society, but function as 'exemplars' (ibid) against which other forms of masculinity are judged. Notably, the hegemonic form changes from environment to environment, as it is only hegemonic within certain patterns of gender relations, rendering it 'always contestable' (p. 76). Other, non-hegemonic forms of masculinity exist in relation to the hegemonic form, wielding less direct power and influence than the hegemonic form, but still functioning alongside it to maintain patriarchy by subordinating women. As Connell



explains, 'the number of men rigorously practicing the hegemonic pattern in its entirety may be quite small. Yet the majority of men gain from its hegemony, since they benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women' (p. 79). For this reason, men who embody subordinated masculinities still have an interest in supporting hegemonic forms, even though they may be treated poorly by the bearers of those hegemonic forms.

Connell further details the hegemonic model as follows: 'Hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to women and to subordinated masculinities' (Connell, 1987, p. 186) and 'All forms of femininity in this society are constructed in the context of the overall subordination of women to men' (ibid). Though what is hegemonically masculine shifts depending on the time and place, "TG" media is, as this project will demonstrate, concerned largely with the masculinities of white Western men, mostly young. While there is no monolithic "white Western man", Kimmel's *Guyland* (2008) draws on the work of sociologist Robert Brannon (1976) to detail the four rules governing what Kimmel's subject – mostly young, mostly white, Western men – should aspire to be, suggesting a hegemonic model. The men of *Guyland* must never be perceived as feminine, must amass wealth and status, must be stoic, and must be threatening if they are to be successful as men (Kimmel, 2008, pp. 45-46). The relationship between hegemonic masculinity and femininity likewise echoes the arguments made by Figs (1970/1978), who predates the hegemonic model by a quarter of a century and thus suggests something broader and more static; 'Man has also been required to live up to an image, but since it was made for him by his father it was more likely to fit in with his own desires [...] There is no conflict except for the external rivalry between men who want the same things [...] But since the standard of womanhood is set by men for

men and not by women, no relaxation of standards is allowable' (Figes, 1970/1978, p. 17). Segal (1990) also writes of men's pain over being made to live up to model of masculinity. 'Though overvalued in society, masculinity remains forever precarious' (Segal, 1990, p. 79), with boys learning to violently reject and devalue their own supposedly feminine qualities, leading to inflicting violence upon themselves and others. Given that "TG" media, as will be demonstrated later on, frequently deals in male protagonists who somehow fail at being sufficiently masculine – nerds, "sissies", losers, and other such labels being prevalent – the understanding of masculinity as hierarchical and existing in relation to femininity is vital to identifying and analysing the assumptions underlying "TG" media.

As stated in this chapter's introduction, the purpose of the above literature review is to provide context for further analysis of "TG" media, and other theorists will be brought in to aid in analysis of specific examples of "TG" media when relevant. Chapter 7 focuses on the representation of women as more desirable than men, and discusses female narcissism with reference to Sandra Bartky and Sheila Jeffreys, as well as Men's Rights critiques of female "beauty power." It discusses how boys come to loathe feminine traits in others, and goes further into Connell's work on the ways in which femininity is integrated into the hierarchical structure of masculinity. Chapter 8 focuses on women as more expressive than men, and draws on literature dealing with emotional labour, particularly Carol Gilligan, as well as gendered experiences of consumerism and personal aesthetic choices, and with the limited nature of gender, as discussed by Butler. Finally, Chapter 9 draws on Ortnor's nature / culture dichotomy, along with work specifically engaging with female "monstrosity", to help explain the link between female bodies and supernatural powers, with reference to literature on female vampires, witches and monsters.

The examples in these chapters were selected from the vast corpus of “TG” media available online, with the project ultimately narrowing down a corpus of 545 “TG” media narratives and then selecting exemplars for analysis. The following chapter will explain the sampling process used, and how the key themes of “TG” media were drawn out from the subsequent corpus using content analysis.

## 4. RESEARCH DESIGN

### Content Analysis

Given the sheer scope of the online “TG” media community, selecting a small corpus of “TG” media texts ran the risk of providing an incomplete picture of the genre. In order to address this, a corpus of 545 separate “TG” media texts was assembled; details of the selection process are discussed later in this chapter. As the project was attempting to engage with what the concerns of “TG” media as a whole were, a content analysis approach was chosen. In *Understanding and Applying Research Design*, Abbot & McKinney (2013) note that this methodology is ideal for asking the question ‘what does a set of artifacts tell us about how, to whom, why and what is communicated?’ (Abbot & McKinney 2013, p. 316). The application of content analysis to research on gender is further discussed by Leavy & Hesse-Biber (2007), who writes that ‘cultural struggles over meaning might result in [...] a set of ideas about a group’ (Leavy & Hesse-Biber 2007, p. 223), and that artefacts produced at the site of these struggles contain ‘these visions and ideas [...] implicit or explicit contradictions [...] dominant narratives, images, ideas and stereotyped representations can be exposed and challenged’ (ibid). Leavy & Hesse-Biber’s work also cites, as an exemplar of successful content analysis, Hedley’s (2002) study of gendered conflict in a broad corpus of Hollywood films – a project which bares many similarities to this one. Content analysis does limit the project in that it is not engaging with the producers or audience of “TG” media. Such engagement was considered in the project’s early stages, but such an ethnographic approach would have been a project in and of itself, so the decision was made to focus on

“TG” media texts – the project can, of course, function as the basis for an ethnography of the “TG” community at a later point.

### Epistemological Considerations

Before this analysis can begin, however, there are epistemological issues which must be addressed when attempting this analysis of “TG” media. As one of the arguments made by this project is that “TG” media is informed by a masculinist standpoint that makes erroneous assumptions about the lives of girls and women, it is necessary to ensure that the project itself has its own well-developed epistemological standpoint which privileges the experiences of those same people.

As Nancy Hartsock (1984/1987) argues, the male standpoint – that of this research project - is privileged over the female standpoint, meaning that patriarchal ideas and assumptions are, whether consciously or unconsciously, accepted as rational and neutral. Because of this, Hartsock argues, 'Feminist theorists must demand that feminist theorizing be grounded in women’s material activity' (Hartsock, 1984/1987, p. 478) by assigning women's experiences an epistemic privilege: socially positioned as subordinate to men, women have experience with the dominant patriarchal culture that makes highly visible the experiences and ideas of men, but also with their own lives, which the dominant culture devalues and erases. This means that women's standpoints arise not only from their own experiences, but from 'the contradiction between the systematically differing structure of male and female life activity in Western cultures' (ibid), making them better placed to

critique gender politics. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 5, “TG” media is overwhelmingly concerned with the standpoint of cisgender heterosexual male characters, and should therefore be critiqued from a standpoint guided by feminist literature.

The same is also true of trans\* people, whose own standpoint was, until recently, ignored by feminist theorists, resulting in works like those of Raymond and Jeffreys, discussed in Chapter 3. The voices of trans\* people have only recently entered the discussion and provided a transgender standpoint, beginning with Sandy Stone's article 'The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto' (1991/2006), which notes how much literature relating to trans\* people in both medicine and feminism ignored the input of trans\* people entirely. Therefore, by attempting to analyse “TG” media in an “unbiased” way, the project would in fact be leaving the project's epistemological framework open to substantive criticism from feminist and trans\* standpoints. As discussed in the final section of Chapter 3, gender and sexuality have always been subject to socially embedded “common sense” assumptions, and to approach the material without a well-defined critical framework risks simply unthinkingly perpetuating these assumptions.

The analysis of this “TG” media content must therefore be guided by existing queer and feminist theory, in line with both the above discussion of standpoint theory, and also the recommendation made by Bonnie Brennen (2012) that attempts at ideological analysis remain bound by 'specific categories and guidelines' (Brennen, 2012, p. 202) in order to help the work remain focused and coherent. Brennen, however, also cites Neil Larsen's (1991)'s argument that a text functions ideologically through representating 'societal principles and values' (Brenner, 2012, p. 202) rather than 'a single ideological vision' (ibid), and therefore

should be open to multiple angles of analysis rather than a single “explanation”. Brennen also draws on Mike Cormack's *Ideology* (1995), which argues that a researcher should focus not just on what is in a text, but what is expected yet absent. By looking at what is omitted, the researcher can get a better handle on how a specific ideology is being constructed – this is highly relevant to the study of “TG” media, as even on a superficial level it is clear that certain expected narrative tropes, particularly those dealing with the difficulties faced by women and marginalised gender identities, have been elided. This will become relevant later on, when discussing how “TG” media represents women as benefiting from social and institutional power, and possessing greater personal freedom than men.

### Selecting a Sample

The two major concerns when deciding what “TG” media to sample were the community’s high rate of turnover, and the ephemeral, unstable nature of online content. As detailed in my introduction, there are a vast number of “TG” websites that have been set up and subsequently abandoned by their creators, as well as websites which have been removed by their hosting providers because they contained copyrighted images that were reproduced without the consent of the owner.

The goal of the sampling process was to acquire a representative sample of “TG” media that has been most successful in finding and maintaining a large audience over time. Given that this project is focused on the narrative aspects of “TG” media, the sampling was only interested in “TG” media which contained narratives, rather than galleries of static

“TG” artwork, such as the Rule 63 material discussed earlier. The sample was selected on the basis of the following criteria:

- The stability of the source.
- The consistency with which the source is updated (no abandoned websites).
- The length of time the source has been online.
- The source’s popularity.
- A focus on *narrative*, rather than on simply depicting transformations.

In terms of stability and consistency, much “TG” media is unacceptable, with many of the sites linked to in “TG” media directories, such as the aforementioned *World of TG* and *Metamorphose.org*, leading to either sites which had been abandoned for years, or simply resulting in error messages. As I mentioned in the introduction, “TG Caption” websites are notoriously unstable and prone to abandonment, and so were not included in the sample.

Even the “stable” sources chosen to study proved to be less than stable at times. The video archive *Miss Mako’s Channel* published an eighty-eight part “TG” video series entitled *The Hyde Syndrome*, which it then removed without warning after approximately a year, only to then publish the series again, also without warning. The ongoing narrative “TG” comic *The Watch* overhauled its design during the research phase of this project, which led to the removal of some pages and rendered many of the original URLs references useless. *TG Comics (and Stories)*, the major focus in this project, had its database entirely replaced during the project’s research phase, leading to some comics being removed from the site entirely – furthermore, *TG Comics (and Stories)* has opted out of inclusion on *Archive.org*,



meaning the deleted material is unrecoverable. In all these cases, the relevant media had already been downloaded to a hard drive, so it was not lost, and was still included in the project.

Four sources of “TG” media were eventually decided on. Because all four sources are constantly updating with new material, it was necessary to decide on a cut-off date, to prevent the sample size from increasingly growing and becoming unmanageable. The beginning of 2015 was chosen, meaning that “TG” media discussed in this project was produced prior to December 31, 2014.

The chosen sources of “TG” media this project uses are:

- *TG Comics (and Stories)*. This is an archive of “TG Comics” first established in 2001 by a “TG” artist using the online pseudonym Femur. There were a total of 430 comics and artworks by sixty-two artists hosted on *TG Comics (and Stories)* by the end of 2014; this number includes material that was uploaded and then subsequently removed. *TG Comics (and Stories)* continues to update regularly. Given the number of artists that *TG Comics (and Stories)* gives online space to, and the amount of content present on it, the bulk of the project’s sample of “TG” media is drawn from here.

- *The Watch*. *The Watch* is an ongoing narrative comic which began in 2002. It was initially written and illustrated Robin Ericson and the pseudonymous Anne Onymous, with Onymous and Ericson’s artwork replaced by the art of Ian Samson between

2013 and 2015. *The Watch* tells the story of a group of high school friends, one of whom is a “Watch” who has the power to magically transform people. As of December 2014, *The Watch* was divided into twenty-four self-contained stories, usually lasting between 15 to 30 pages, and thirty-six smaller “filler” stories which rarely lasted longer than a single page. Many kinds of transformation are featured in *The Watch*, though “TG” content is by far the most prevalent. At the height of its popularity, *The Watch* was popular enough to receive over \$2000 USD a month in donations (“Donation Bar Archives”, 2008), have its own official merchandise (“Figures!”, 2007), and a prototype video game in development (“The Watch: My Sister, Myself”, 2006). Between its lengthier narratives and “fillers”, *The Watch* accounts for sixty narratives in the project’s sample.

- *Miss Mako’s Channel*. *Miss Mako’s Channel* combines the complete video work of Mako, an important figure in the early days of “TG” media, as discussed in the introduction. *Miss Mako’s Channel* was created in 2006, but hosts Mako’s early film and animation work, some of which was initially sold for profit, as well as the newer vlog series *The Hyde Syndrome* and the “Mako’s Collection” comic montage collection. By January 2015, *Miss Mako’s Channel* had 25.1 million total views (in 2017, the number has more than doubled, to 60.3 million). While it is not available on the channel, the project’s corpus includes Mako’s commercially available feature film *Paradox Alice* (Dapkewicz, 2013); it is heavily promoted on *Miss Mako’s Channel*, with trailers and a production diary, but must be purchased through the website Amazon.com. Including *Paradox Alice*, *Miss Mako’s Channel* accounts for forty of the narratives in the project’s sample.

- *Three Degrees Off Center Productions*, which hosts the transformation-themed videos of “TG” media creator James Ward, a writer / director / actor who has collaborated frequently with Mako. Ward’s channel hosts several “TG” video series, as well as trailers and other promotional content for his two commercially released “TG” movies, *Identity Theft* (Ward, 2009) and *The Hit Girl* (Ward, 2014). While not as popular a channel as *Miss Mako’s Channel*, the commitment to producing two professional “TG” feature films, when there is only one other available - Mako’s *Paradox Alice* - ultimately led to its inclusion. As with *Paradox Alice*, the films *Identity Theft* and *The Hit Girl* are not available on the channel, but are heavily promoted through it, so were included. By January 2015, *Three Degrees Off Center Productions* had a total of 11.5 million views (as with *Miss Mako’s Channel*, the total views have increased dramatically the last two years, almost doubling to 20 million). Including *Identity Theft* and *The Hit Girl*, *Three Degrees Off Center Productions* accounted for fifteen of the “TG” narratives in this sample.

All narratives featured on these four websites prior to January 2015 were included in the sample. Narratives split into multiple parts (such as Mako’s *The Hyde Syndrome*, which is one story told over eighty-eight short videos) were counted as one narrative. Narratives which were available in 2013 but subsequently removed were still included. These were the comics *BFFs: Best Friends Forever* and *Last Penalty*, which were originally hosted on *TG Comics (and Stories)*, and the short film *Eleven*, which cannot be hosted on *Miss Mako’s Channel* due to nudity. *BFFs: Best Friends Forever* and *Last Penalty* can be accessed on other galleries, while *Eleven* can only be acquired through peer-to-peer file sharing. The total

number of narratives in the sample was ultimately 545.

## Coding the Content

The purpose of this initial sample of “TG” content was, as stated earlier, to provide a broad overview of the “what” of “TG” media; what kind of stories were being told, and what was happening in them. At this point, the focus was not on teasing out the themes of “TG” media, or thinking about how “TG” media narratives represent the social context that produced them – this would come later. This approach is in line with what Saldana (2013) argues in *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, suggesting that a researcher should not 'code for themes' because 'A theme is an outcome of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection, not something is, in itself, coded' (Saldana, 2013, p. 13). Rossman & Rallis (2003) likewise make the distinction that a code is 'a word or phrase describing some segment of your data that is explicit' while a theme is 'a phrase or sentence describing more subtle and tacit processes' (p. Rossman & Rallis, 2003, 282).

This initial round of coding looked for the following aspects of “TG” media narratives, because they were, firstly, things which were easily observed on a purely superficial level without recourse to deeper analysis, and secondly, they were aspects which described the kind of stories being told:

## Content Rating

Much of the project's "TG" media sample comes with a self-imposed rating which identifies how sexually explicit the material is. This is a useful indicator of, naturally, how "TG" media deals with sex acts. The ratings were coded simply by looking at what rating had been given to each piece of "TG" media by the website it was hosted on.

Not all websites used the same content ratings; *TG Comics (and Stories)* uses its own system, whereas *The Watch* describes itself using the MPAA rating "PG-13" and the films made available for streaming likewise use MPAA ratings. As the purpose of coding for content rating is to determine how sexually explicit the material is, the exact system used to rate the content is less important than what the content ratings are communicating.

## Genre

As with ratings, "TG" media often has a self-imposed genre label; something discussed at length at the conclusion of Chapter 2. Almost every piece of "TG" media hosted on *TG Comics (and Stories)* has a genre attributed, as do the videos which were available for streaming on *Amazon.com*, though not *YouTube*. This was noted because it helps provide an overview of the kind of stories "TG" media is telling.

### **Transformation Sex-Swap**

This simply indicated whether a transformation was male-to-female, female-to-male, or – in some rare cases – a non-normatively sexed body with primary and secondary characteristics of both sexes. This was based on what was observed occurring in the narratives, or with events the audience are informed of, but do not witness.

### **Transformation Agency**

Why does a character transform? The goal of coding this was to help understand the degree of agency “TG” characters have over their transformations, as this informs the kind of story being told: Are these characters who freely enjoy the ability to change sex, or is it something forced upon them against their will? This was coded by, again, simply observing the events in the narrative.

The transformations were divided into “Voluntary” (in which the character chooses to transform), “Forced” (in which an outside force causes the transformation against the character’s will), “Accidental” (in which the transformation is accidentally triggered by the character), and “Spontaneous” (in which the transformation simply occurs for no narrative reason).

## LGBT Content

Were characters explicitly identified as homosexual, bisexual, or trans\* at any point in the narrative? This was based on what characters were observed doing (e.g. being shown in a same-sex relationship), what the audience is told, but not shown, about a character within a narrative (e.g. a character discussing another character's sexuality), and what the audience is told about a character outside of the narrative (e.g. the short description of a narrative mentioning that a character is trans\*, but this not being communicated directly within the narrative itself). The codes here took into account a character's assigned sex and gender within the narrative; "trans woman" rather than "trans\*", "homosexual woman" rather than "homosexual", etc., as the precise role of sexes and genders in these narratives is integral to understanding the discourses that "TG" media is reproducing.

Given that a character is sometimes presented as struggling with gender identity, but lacking a specific definition (they could be trans, gay, nonbinary, gender non-conforming, etc.), these were coded as "questioning masculinity" or "questioning femininity".

All this superficial information was tabulated and is available in Appendix A. The superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* is in Tables A1 to A4; superficial content of *The Watch* is in Tables A5 and A6; superficial content of *The Siren's Song* and *Miss Mako* videos is in Table A7; and superficial content of *Three Degrees Off Center* videos is in Table A8.

## 5. INTERPRETATION OF CONTENT ANALYSIS

After interpreting the coded content in light of the literature discussed in Chapter 3, it was theorised that there were three distinct characteristics of “TG” media which set it apart as something unique; a niche which is apart from mainstream representations of trans or cross-dressing characters, but is likewise not simply pornographic. These were, firstly, a strong emphasis on content which was not sexually explicit; secondly, the presence of multiple genres, and thirdly, the distinct lack of trans\* – or LGBT in general – content present in the material. At this point the definitions of these characteristics were deliberately broad, as the purpose of this stage of content analysis was to establish an overview of “TG” media to help guide a more in-depth analysis later on.

While Chapter 2 established that “TG” existed apart from sex-change transformation narratives, the characteristics identified in this chapter help suggest why this is; while manifestly “about” the transformation of a body’s sex, “TG” media is not pornographic, is not grounded in any particular genre of fiction, and is not addressing issues of trans\* identity.

### “TG” Media’s Lack of Sexually Explicit Content

The lack of sexually explicit content in “TG” media is notable not simply because there is an appreciable lack, but because “TG” media itself explicitly draws attention to it. *TG Comics (and Stories)* has all its hosted material given a content rating, in much the same



way as films and television programs are, to designate the presence of explicit material. As the *TG Comics (and Stories)* website explains:

‘To ensure that people get to see the content they choose to see (and don’t have to see the content they don’t want to see), all the content on the site is rated with the designations of C, R, M or X.’

(“Site Information”, n.d.)

Of these, “C” designates absolutely no nudity or sexual situations at all, “R” designates non-explicit sexual content, “M” designates explicit sex, and “X” designates that the content is purely pornographic (notably, this differs from most other rating systems in which explicit sex is “R” and non-explicit sexual content is “M”). The most common rating in the project’s sample of *TG Comics (and Stories)* was R, which accounted for 152 out of 430 comics; over a third of the *TG Comics (and Stories)* sample. After this is C, which accounts for 139 comics, then M, with 78, and X with thirty-one. Overall, over two thirds (>67%) of the comics sampled from *TG Comics (and Stories)* are designated as containing material that is not considered sexually explicit, though some nudity may be present. When considering only comics that contain no explicit material or nudity, the number is still only slightly under a third of the sample (>32%).

Ongoing narrative comic *The Watch* likewise makes a point of foregrounding its lack of sexually explicit content. Prior to its website design being altered in 2016, the front page of *The Watch* linked to an FAQ document designed to introduce the comic to new readers, with the description ‘If you’ve never read the comic before, this is the right place to start!’

("FAQ:Beginner", 2007). Of the five questions answered, the fifth explicitly clarifies the authors' position on the role that sexuality plays in the comic's use of transformation:

'Isn't that stuff sexual in nature?

No. Inherently TF and TG stuff have nothing to do with sex; in fact, here at the Watch, we enforce the rule that everything here is PG-13 or less. This is intended to be a friendly, fun comic suitable for everybody.'

(ibid)

Of the video content in the sample, only the feature film *Paradox Alice* has a content rating (R, restricted to audiences over 18), while the others are unrated. All films apart from *Paradox Alice*, *The Hit Girl* and *Identity Theft* are hosted on the *YouTube* video sharing platform, which only allows for sexually explicit content 'if the primary purpose is educational, documentary, scientific, or artistic, and it isn't gratuitously graphic' ("Nudity and Sexual Content", 2017). As the videos in question have been hosted on *YouTube* for between two to ten years without being removed for violating the site's terms of service, it can be assumed that the sexual content in these videos is not considered inappropriate. The only instance of a video being deemed unfit for *YouTube* appears to be the *Miss Mako's Channel* video *Eleven*, which features prolonged nudity and is only available online in a truncated form.

On the basis of the content discussed above, it can be confidently argued that sexually explicit material is *not* a core component of "TG" media and, in fact, that the majority of "TG" media discussed is presented by its authors as being non-sexual in nature.

The above is, of course, a quantitative analysis of “TG” media’s superficial content, as defined by “TG” media authors themselves, and is something that will later be expanded on.

Before moving on to discuss “TG” media’s used of genre, it should be noted that the honesty of “TG” media authors’ discussion of the sexual nature of their work has previously been called into question, specifically the claims made by the authors of *The Watch*. In an archived 2007 review of *The Watch* posted on the comedy blog *Your Webcomic Is Bad And You Should Feel Bad*, author Ted David sarcastically responds to *The Watch*’s claim that it is a non-sexual comic with ‘Yep. Non-sexual. Just for fun. Oh really? Yeah, I guess I can believe that’ (David, 2007), with each word linking to a different page of *The Watch* containing what David considers sexual material. These include a transformed monster admiring its new female body in a mirror and partially baring its breasts, the two male leads transformed into women wearing fetishistic “maid” and “schoolgirl” uniforms, and a man transformed into a woman in a bikini. This seeming contradiction between overt sexualisation and a lack of sexually explicit content will be discussed in later chapters.

### “TG” Media’s Use Of Other Genre Conventions

The use of other genres to “modify” the “TG” genre was discussed in Chapter 2, and what follows is an examination of how these genres work together with the “TG” genre.

*TG Comics (and Stories)*, as discussed earlier, explicitly identifies its content with genre labels. Though not the most frequent genre, this discussion will lead with the use of

the genre “Simple TF”, which accounts for sixty-eight of the 430 comics (>15%) in the *TG Comics (and Stories)* sample. Comics with the genre Simple TF are, as the name implies, a “simple transformation” – a character changes sex spontaneously with little to no plot or context surrounding the transformation. A further thirty-nine comics (9%) are not given a genre, with *TG Comics (and Stories)* either simply not providing a genre or designating their genre as “N/A”. The reason for highlighting the Simple TF and “N/A” genres is to demonstrate that every other comic on *TG Comics (and Stories)* is considered to be about more than its transformation – its story and characters can, ostensibly, be considered to belong to a genre of fiction that is not purely transformation-related. These comics with defined genres account for over three quarters (>75%) of the content in the sample of *TG Comics (and Stories)* archive.

The most common genre is “Magic”, which is applied to 150 of the 430 comics (>34%), designating stories with a contemporary setting in which a transformation is caused through magical means. Ignoring “Simple TF”, the second most frequently appearing genre is “Science Fiction”, with sixty-five comics (>15%), which includes contemporary stories as well as Star Trek-esque space opera. Other genres include “Superhero” (41 comics), “Humor” (27 comics), “Supernatural” (25 comics) and “Fantasy” (16 comics), with some genres, such as “Black Humor” and “Mystery” applying to fewer than five comics. Overall, there are nineteen distinct genres represented in the project’s sample of *TG Comics (and Stories)* comics. The purpose of noting the multiplicity of genres represented here is not to analyse the specific use of the genres themselves, but to highlight that, on the basis of *TG Comics (and Stories)*’ genre catalogue, its focus is not on the “Simple TF” genre – it is focused on telling stories.

*TG Comics (and Stories)* also divides its comics into four categories, independent of genre: “Comics”, “Vignettes”, “Sequences” and “Story Panels”. While these distinctions are never explicitly stated by *TG Comics (and Stories)*, all sixty-eight examples of Simple TF are in comics listed as being “Sequences”, as are seventy of the seventy-nine examples of comics with no genre. This creates a further distinction, with the Simple TF stories being further demarcated from the rest of the *TG Comics (and Stories)* archive as a form of comic that does not focus on a narrative.

*The Watch* issues and YouTube videos sampled do not label themselves with genres. However, the two films available commercially on streaming video – *Paradox Alice* and *The Hit Girl* – are all given genre tags on their Amazon.com streaming video pages. *Paradox Alice* is classified as Science Fiction (“Paradox Alice”, n.d.), while *The Hit Girl* is an Action / Adventure / Comedy (“The Hit Girl”, n.d.). The synopsis of *Paradox Alice* does not allude to the presence of any transformation-related content, and presents it as part of a new wave of intelligent, humanist science fiction films:

‘A cornerstone in the new paradigm of outer space Sci-Fi movies like Clooney and Bullock's *Gravity*, *Paradox Alice* sets off from Europa in an epic lost in space odyssey’.  
 (“Paradox Alice”, n.d.)

*The Hit Girl*'s description, however, foregrounds the transformation, comparing itself to well-known body-swap comedies:

‘In the tradition of *Freaky Friday*, *The Hit Girl* tells the tale of a government hit man whose awkwardly worded wish ends up turning him into a teenage girl’.

(“The Hit Girl”, n.d.)

In both cases, the films are presented as being part of two well-known genre traditions (science fiction adventure and body-swap comedy), rather than products of a niche internet community centred around magical sex changes.

On the basis of the way in which the sample of “TG” media uses narrative genre labels, as well as the way in which *TG Comics (and Stories)* demarcates its narrative comics from its “Simple TF” and “Sequences” comics, “TG” media is not *simply* about the spectacle of a male character becoming a female character – the context in which it happens, and the lives of characters before and after, are also relevant.

### “TG” Media’s Lack Of Interest In LGBT Characters

A survey of the sample’s content demonstrates that “TG” media does not, in general, engage with trans\* characters, or with any LGBT themes – rather, it overwhelmingly depicts heterosexual cisgender male characters who are transformed from male-to-female against their will.

In the project’s corpus of 545 “TG” media narratives, there were 503 narratives in which male characters became female (>92%), compared to only twenty-eight narratives in

which female characters became male (>5%). It should be noted that, in twenty-four of the twenty-eight cases in which a female-to-male transformation occurred, this was the result of male and female characters exchanging bodies, meaning that the transformation of a male character also featured. It is also notable that not every “TG” narrative in the corpus includes a transformation, with some simply consisting of characters going about their daily lives before or after transforming.

The claim that “TG” media has little to no interest in trans\* characters may initially sound counter-intuitive, given that its central conceit is that male characters are transformed into female ones, and that “TG” is an abbreviation of “transgender”. The content analysis of this sample, however, reveals a distinct lack of engagement with not only trans\* themes, but any LGBT-related themes at all – as a genre, the concerns of “TG” are overwhelming heteronormative.

The transformed characters were, prior to their transformations, almost never depicted as identifying themselves as trans\*. Only fifteen narratives out of 545 in the sample (>2%) featured characters who were identified as trans\*, with thirteen stories featuring characters who identified as trans women and two featuring characters who identified as trans men. Alongside this, five narratives (<1%) featured characters who did not identify themselves as trans\*, but did openly express curiosity about what it would be like to be the opposite sex, and expressed frustration at binary gender roles. The contributions of “TG” content creator Mako are notable in this regard. While Mako began openly identifying as a trans woman in 2016, none of Mako’s vast body of “TG” texts feature

trans\* characters in any capacity, and instead focus on cisgender men who are depicted as secure in their male identity.

Depictions of same-sex attraction are, likewise, scarce. Only four narratives (<1%) depicted men who were attracted to other men, while twenty-two narratives (>4%) depicted women attracted to other women, and ten narratives (>1%) depicted women attracted to both men and women. Bisexual men were never represented in the sample at all. It should also be noted that all instances of a male character portrayed as homosexual relate to a character who has not yet transformed, such as the protagonist of *All My Love* (Femur, 2005), who transforms into a woman in order to be with a homophobic man they are in love with, or characters who do not transform at all, such as the cross-dresser in *Doki Doki Cross-Dressing Date* (Sakkat, 2012a). However, all but one instance of female characters depicted as same-sex attracted relate to female characters who were originally heterosexual men prior to their transformation – in other words, their female homosexuality is depicted as a cisgender male heterosexuality currently inhabiting a female body. Such comics, like *Lab Accident* (Sturkwurk & Anonymous, 2012) and *Anniversary in Vegas* (CBlack, 2008), play out not unlike an extended version of the ‘I can look at myself naked!’ scene from *Scooby Doo* discussed in Chapter 2, or the character of Antoine/Johanna from *Une Femme dans la Peau*.

Character agency in transformation is also relevant: Of the 545 “TG” media narratives in the sample, 112 (>20%) featured a transformation that was undergone voluntarily. This does not mean that 112 characters were trans\*, as the above paragraph demonstrates that there are substantially fewer than 112. These transformations, while



voluntary, were often driven by pragmatism, such as attempting to disguise oneself, or to impersonate somebody else, rather than a trans\* subjectivity hoping to affirm their gender identity. It is not, however, the most common character agency when transformation – the most common is, rather, that the character is forced to transform against their will, which occurs 179 times (>32%). Transformations which were accidentally triggered, such as a misworded wish or a malfunctioning piece of technology, occurred 110 times (>20%) and transformations with no identifiable cause occurred 106 times (>19%). This demonstrates that “TG” media is not simply concerned with heterosexual cisgender men becoming women, but overwhelmingly with heterosexual cisgender men becoming women without actively attempting to.

### “TG” Media’s Masculinist Standpoint

Before moving on to discussing “TG” media with reference to literature discussed in Chapter 3, it should be noted that the above observations of “TG” media’s superficial content conforms to what Arthur Brittan in *Masculinity and Power* (1989) calls “masculinism”:

Masculinism takes it for granted that [1] there is a fundamental difference between men and women, [2] it assumes heterosexuality is normal, [3] it accepts without question the sexual division of labour, and [4] it sanctions the political and dominant role of men in the public and private spheres.

(Brittan, 1989, p 4).

As the above discussion of “TG” media’s content demonstrates, the genre is overwhelmingly informed by a masculinist standpoint. Its use of sex-change transformations as a plot device is premised on the belief that there is a fundamental difference between men and women, and it is uninterested in LGBT characters, satisfying Brittan’s first two criteria. As will become apparent when the project begins discussing Social Inversion, the sexual division of labour is not only taken for granted, but celebrated as something which benefits both men and women by creating pleasurable gendered experiences. Men’s dominant role in both private and public is also a key component of “TG” media, with men who grow tired of the dominant role resolving their conflict by becoming subordinate women; a subordinate man is simply unacceptable.

As Brittan details, masculinism is distinct from masculinity, in that it is an ideological framework which functions to privilege masculinity by enshrining masculine qualities as “natural” and thus rendering alternative ways of being abnormal and deviant. Indeed, as the recent resurgence in antifeminist politics online has demonstrated (Nicholas & Agius, 2018), the masculinist ideological framework is effectively interchangeable with “common sense” assumptions about gender, so its reproduction in “TG” media is unsurprising. Like Connell, Brittan notes that masculinity is ‘always local and subject to change’ (Brittain, 1989 p. 3), but ‘the masculine ideology [...] masculinism’ (ibid) remains constant, defined by the criteria discussed above. What is especially relevant to the discussion of “TG” media is Brittan’s observation that masculinism remains constant ‘Even when there is a great deal of gender and sexual experimentation’ (p. 6). This allows for “TG” media characters to change their sex on a whim and switch back and forth between masculine or feminine gender expression within the same story while never threatening to undermine patriarchy; provided these

“TG” narratives continue to assert that men and women are fundamentally different and that this justifies a “natural” sexual division of labour (including heterosexuality) in which men are dominant, “TG” media can be at once both sexually polymorphous and completely nonthreatening. As Chapters 7, 8 and 9 will demonstrate, it is only the experiences of men that are foregrounded and deemed to matter.

Having identified the most common features of “TG” media using this content analysis, the next step is to begin interpreting it. This will take the form of one more chapter, “Is “TG” About Social, Not Sexual, Transformation?”, in which it is argued that what is central to “TG” media is the inversion of a character’s *social* position. This is then followed by three larger chapters each examining a different form of inversion – Rejected to Desired, Restrained to Free and Ordinary to Supernatural – and how they can be understood in terms of discourses around gender.

## 6. SOCIAL INVERSION: IS “TG” ABOUT SOCIAL, NOT SEXUAL, TRANSFORMATION?

Having now looked at existing literature in Chapter 3 and used content analysis to identify the most common events in “TG” media in Chapter 5, this chapter will focus on using that literature to assess the result of the content analysis. In the case of the literature on trans\* representation, analysis reveals that, while it is *in part* applicable to “TG” media, there are sizeable gaps and incongruities in attempting to reconcile the two. Applying literature on the backlash and the Men’s Rights movement, however, reveals something of the underlying ideology, which also intersects – in part – with literature on the ontology of gender, viewing masculinity as an unnatural construct that men cannot ever correctly embody, while simultaneously considering femininity to be entirely natural and unproblematic. This leads to the conclusion that “TG” media is engaging with the *social* aspects of sex, which it presents as inseparable from gender, and is doing so from a masculinist standpoint which only considers the male point of view. Because of this, it is best to engage with “TG” media narratives as narratives of social, rather than sexual, transformation, leading to the concept of Social Inversion which will guide the remainder of the project’s analysis.

### “TG” Media, Postfeminism, Backlash and Men’s Rights

Postfeminist backlash discourse permeates “TG”, as does the representation of men and boys as directionless and victimised by a society which does not care for them.

However, the backlash discourse in “TG” is limited to that which represents contemporary women as entirely liberated and no longer in need of feminism, not that which represents feminism as having harmed women by separating them from their domestic “nature”.

Combined with “TG” media’s masculinist standpoint, it is unsurprising that these assumptions ultimately lead to “TG” media echoing many of the arguments of the Men’s Rights movement, presenting men as oppressed in comparison to women, although feminism is not explicitly cited as the cause.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Faludi (1991/2006) observes that a key argument of the backlash discourse was the claim that feminism had harmed women by encouraging them to focus on their careers rather than marriage and family; something that ran counter to women’s assumed biologically determined role as caregivers. Such a discourse is not explicitly present in the “TG” media this project is engaging with. Women are not represented as being hurt by feminism, or having been denied their essential nature by entering the workforce. Rather, “TG” media portrays women in the workforce as hyperfeminine and sexually uninhibited, such as the female scientists in *The Assault* (Sturkwurk & Nimeyal, 2014) and *Hanover Tales* (Sturkwurk, 2013) who find that playing with their sex appeal makes their jobs more enjoyable, or the young professional women in *Lab Accident* (Sturkwurk & Anonymous, 2012) and *BFF: Best Friends Forever* (TG Tony, 2010), whose independent income allows them greater access to beauty and fashion products. The only instance of a woman depicted as “harmed” by her career aspirations is the female boss of a law firm in *Payback Possession* (Infinity Sign, 2007a), whose body derives immense pleasure from submission, but is too invested in being in control that she

will not allow herself to be dominated. However, while these women embrace being feminine and sexualised, there is no discussion of domesticity or family; this suggests that these women *have* chosen their careers over a family, but unlike backlash discourse, it is here represented positively as a source of freedom.

Notably, while “TG” media does not represent women as being harmed by dedication to their careers, it does represent career dedication as harming men. As will be explored in depth in Chapter 8, men in “TG” media suffer emotionally and physically through pursuing work at the expense of family. The “TG” comics *Playing the Part* (Sturkwurk & Femur, 2011), *Daddy’s Prom* (Infinity Sign & Christie, 2014) and *The Watch*, among others, all feature older men who are left lonely, bitter and perpetually stressed by their commitment to work over all else. What resolves this is not quitting their job, but transformation into a young woman who then adopts traditionally feminine domestic duties for a male provider, a situation depicted explicitly as more fulfilling than entering the workforce. This echoes literature discussed in Chapter 3; both the backlash discourse around women losing touch with “natural” femininity by leaving the home, and also the “three-option woman and single option man.” Men’s Rights claim that contemporary women have the freedom to choose between work and career, while men have no choices and must enter the workforce.

As the above suggests, the postfeminist notion that feminism is now obsolete, having achieved its goals, is also implicit in “TG” media, with only one narrative in the corpus representing women as an oppressed class; the comics *Festival* (Femur & Stipple, 2006) and

*Office Downsizing* (Blackshirtboy, 2012). *Festival* is the story of a male member of a 1960's hippie commune who transforms into a woman after taking a strange drug he is offered at a music festival. They enjoy being a woman within the commune, having sex with both men and women, but after the commune disbands, they are forced to deal with sexism in 'a different, harsher world' (Femur & Stipple, 2006, p. 8). *Office Downsizing*, meanwhile, depicts a businessman getting demoted to a lower paying position in the company by being physically transformed into a female secretary, acknowledging a sex disparity with regard to institutional power. Outside of *Festival* and *Office Downsizing*, however, there is no "harshness" depicted in the world, with women in "TG" media uncontroversially holding positions of institutional power, having successful careers, playing sports and serving in the military. This echoes some of the postfeminist discourses discussed earlier, which argue that feminism is no longer necessary, with women having achieved formal equality and held back only through their "choices"; this will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8.

As with the above discussion of work vs. family, however, men *are* represented as the victims of prejudice. Boys in *The Watch* feel as though they cannot express themselves, the protagonist of *The Gallery* (Sturkwurk, 2012a) is mocked for being a man who speaks openly about the beauty of art, men are turned away from clubs for being men in *Rave New World* (Smooch 2009) and *Infinite Stories 2* (Infinity Sign, 2013a), men are shamed for working in fashion in *Bus Stop* (Sturkwurk, 2012b), and men are made pariahs for caring about their appearances in *Narcissus Twin* (CBlack, 2009) and *Temazcal* (Kannel, 2014a). This echoes the representation of men in Men's Rights discourse, with men being barred

from entering the club in *Rave New World* explicitly invoking “reverse discrimination” arguments; this will be covered in detail in Chapter 7.

Notably, only one “TG” narrative – a fraction of a percent of the project’s corpus - ever discusses feminism. This takes place in an issue of the ongoing “TG” comic *The Watch*, “D.O.L.L.Y.”, in which the villains are ‘a group of extreme feminists’ (Onymous & Ericson, 2006a, p. 2) who believe women are superior and men should not exist. These feminists release a gas which causes women to turn against men, then transform the now-subjugated male population into women in order to eradicate men from the Earth (this is mostly reversed during the story’s climax). Not only is this the only instance of “TG” media engaging with feminism, its level of engagement is simply to use feminism as the driving force behind a series of “TG” transformations, rather than attempt to critique it. While it is deeply inaccurate to say that “TG” media is “not antifeminist” – it is heavily invested in patriarchy and gender essentialism, and is concerned almost exclusively with the representation of men as victims and women as spoiled – it does not engage with the kinds of explicit attacks on the feminist movement itself that are common to Backlash and Men’s Rights discourse, which demand that the gains of feminism be reversed and society returned to a more traditional configuration. Rather, it depicts a society in which women simply *are* privileged, recalling McRobbie (2004)’s observation that the relative freedom of contemporary women in comparison to past generations is depicted as simply ‘taken for granted, unreliant on any past struggle’ (McRobbie, 2004, p. 6); this will be explored further in Chapter 8.



## “TG” Media and Trans\* Representation

As demonstrated in Chapter 5, “TG” media has little to no interest in trans\* characters, with only >2% of characters in the project’s corpus identifying themselves as trans\*. Reading these narratives in light of the observations by Phillips (2006), Ryan (2009), and the others quoted in Chapter 3 reveals that their observations on the representation of trans\* characters is applicable in some instances, but also reveals significant gaps.

Firstly, the few trans\* characters who do appear in “TG” media are not necessarily the story’s protagonist; the characters of Irene and Mitch from *The Watch* are both depicted as teenagers struggling with a potential trans\* identity, but they are members of the comic’s *supporting cast*, with Mitch barely featuring and Irene’s questioning of her gender only explored in strips that are explicitly identified as ‘filler’ rather than integral parts of the narrative; It would be entirely possible to read through every numbered issue of *The Watch* and have no indication that Irene is seriously considering that she might rather be a boy, despite her being a frequently-recurring character. However, both Mitch and Irene are presented seriously (albeit within the framework of a light-hearted comedy), and do not fall into the reactionary tropes and stereotypes of trans\* supporting characters identified by Phillips and Ryan.

Looking at “TG” characters in light of Phillips and Ryan’s observations that trans\* characters are often depicted as engaged in deception reveals that this trope does not entirely fit “TG” media. While it is accurate that some “TG” characters transform in order to deceive others, the form and function of their deception is entirely different. For example,

the “TG” comic *Detective Darvy* (Infinity Sign, 2009a) tells the story of Darvy, a detective who transforms himself into a woman in order to infiltrate a brothel by posing as one of the female sex workers. However, while Phillips and Ryan emphasise that the audience appeal of “deceptive” trans\* characters is that they are perpetually in danger of having their assigned sex revealed, there is no such tension in *Detective Darvy*. Rather, Darvy transforms his body using nebulously-defined science fiction technology and is treated as a “normal” and “natural” woman from that point on, with no looming threat of “discovery”, as the narrative does not present there being anything about Darvy’s new body to discover. Furthermore, while a key feature of some “deception” narratives is that the trans\* character returns to their “real” sex once the deception ceases to be necessary, this is not true of Darvy, who enjoys being a sex worker so much that they choose to remain in the brothel. *Detective Darvy* is far from the only example of this in “TG” media; *Codename: Agent Kitty*, *Daddy’s Prom*, *Fall of Camelot*, *BFF: Best Friends Forever* and many other narratives, some discussed in detail in later chapters, follow roughly the same outline as *Detective Darvy*, with the focus on the character’s choice to embrace their new female identity over their original male one, rather than on tensions surrounding a possible “discovery”. The only examples of “TG” media in the corpus which fit the “deceptive” model identified by Phillips and Ryan are the comics *Gun Moll* (Wright, 2014), about a male secret agent who disguises himself as a woman to seduce targets before returning to his male identity and assassinating them, and *All My Love* (Femur, 2005), in which a trans woman is rejected by her transphobic male partner once he discovers she is trans. Another comic, *Doki Doki Crossdressing Date* (Sakkat, 2012a), depicts a heterosexual man’s struggle with his sexual identity after finding himself attracted to a male cross-dresser; however, the cross-

dresser is depicted as open about being male from the beginning, with the focus instead on the protagonist's crisis over worrying he may be gay.

The implicit association between trans\* identity, psychological instability and monstrosity identified by Phillips and Ryan is likewise rendered very differently in "TG" media. This is understandable, as Phillips and Ryan both note that the implicit link between trans\* and monstrosity is that the existence of both crosses previously stable boundaries, whereas "TG" transformations keep the boundaries intact and simply have a character swap from one side of them to the other. Many "TG" media narratives present characters as unstable and monstrous following their "TG" transformations; *Spellbook of the Damned* (Seer Coltz, 2009), *Touched by the Hand of God* (Mako, 2010a), and *Mother Nature* (Infinity Sign, 2010), among others, have transformed characters presented as literal supernatural monsters who murder their former friends. However, in these stories, the change in personality (and occasionally species) is associated with becoming female, rather than a trans\* identity, and draws on common archetypes of what Creed (1993/2001) calls "the monstrous-feminine", particularly the predatory female vampire. This is closer to the ontologies of femininity described in Chapter 3, especially the influential work of Ortner (1974), in which the female body is treated as occupying a liminal space between the rational human and the irrational nonhuman, which will be further developed with reference to theories of "female monstrosity", such as Barbara Creed and Eva Figes, in Chapter 9.

Phillips' notes on the potential eroticism of bodies which cross boundaries, and the subsequent objectification of trans\* people, is also largely absent from "TG" media. This is

understandable, given that Chapter 5 demonstrated “TG” media’s disinterest in both trans\* people and depictions of sexual activity, although four “TG” narratives in the corpus (<1%) do foreground boundary-crossing bodies. The comics *Idol Worship* (Sturkwurk & Kaplanos, 2013) and *The Rose* (CBlack, 2014) both feature what are presented as “realistic” trans women’s bodies, while *The Girl Can’t Help It* (Aram, 2014) and *The Marble Monkey* (Jenny Tgirl & Morpheus, 2008) depict boundary-crossing bodies as the result of a virus outbreak and a misworded wish, respectively. Of the four, only *The Rose* does not feature explicit sexual content and, in fact, ends with the trans woman’s body being “corrected” by a magic spell, so that she appears to be a cisgender woman, rather than a trans woman, and thus her body no longer crosses sexual boundaries. *Idol Worship*, *The Girl Can’t Help It* and *The Marble Monkey*, meanwhile, feature explicit sex scenes between characters whose bodies cross boundaries. In *Idol Worship* and *The Girl Can’t Help It*, the sex is between characters whose bodies have female secondary sexual characteristics and male genitalia, while in *The Marble Monkey*, it is between a character with primary and secondary female sexual characteristics and a character with female secondary sexuality characteristics and male genitalia. This conforms with Phillips’ observation, quoted in Chapter 3, that the most popular form of trans\* pornography is “she-male” pornography featuring trans women with penises, although they do not conform to other aspects of Phillips’ observations; there is no tension and release around “revealing” the penis, and there is no cisgender male participant. Furthermore, these stories still account for fewer than one percent of the corpus.

This focus on sexual transformation, but lack of interest (sexual or otherwise) in trans\* bodies, recalls the observations made by Leung (2006), discussed in Chapter 3, on the

changing portrayal of the character Dongfang Bubai. As Leung points out, Bubai's original portrayal as a man who castrated himself gave way to a more modern portrayal in which Bubai transforms from a man into a sexually desirable woman. While superficially this may make the character explicitly trans\*, the total transformation of Bubai's body via a magical ritual has Bubai exchange a stable male identity for a stable female identity, and is thus a less subversive character. "TG" media appears to be conforming to this approach, given its disinterest in trans\* bodies and similar use of transformations which allow characters to move from stable identity to stable identity. As the project will argue across Chapters 7, 8 and 9, "TG" media seems heavily invested in static, stable gender roles, and thus characters who cross boundaries or fail to conform are of little interest.

### "TG" Media, Cross-Dressing and Cultural Genitals

Looking at the project's corpus of "TG" media in light of Flanagan (2007) and Garber's (1992/2011) work on the narrative conventions of cross-dressing reveals that, rather than conforming to these conventions, "TG" media frequently presents the *inverse* of them, resulting in scenarios that are the opposite of those cited by Flanagan and Garber. Given that Flanagan and Garber's work argues that the conventions of fictional cross-dressing exist in part to valorise masculinity, "TG" media's inversion of these conventions suggests a unique view of gender which can be further explored. Furthermore, "TG" media's apparent contradictory relationship between focusing on a character's sex while *also* displaying an aversion to displaying genitalia suggests it can be understood through Kessler & McKenna's (1985) work on cultural genitals, discussed in Chapter 3.

While “TG” media being the inverse of Flanagan and Garber’s observations will be the focus of this section, it is important to note that this is not always the case; rather, it is the inverse of Flanagan and Garber’s observations on men performing femininity, with their observations on women performing masculinity remaining consistent. As discussed earlier in this chapter, “TG” media frequently positively portrays women involved in traditionally masculine tasks, from corporate executives (*Payback Possession*) to wrestlers (*The Watch*) to scientists (*The Assault*) to superheroes (*Vixodus*) to computer nerds (*Rabbit’s Foot*), and does so positively, with these women portrayed as both competent and highly sexually desirable. While these women are not disguising themselves as men to do so, as the cross-dressing women written about by Flanagan & Garber are, they still conform to underlying ideology; masculinity is something to be respected, and something which must be actively created by a subject, and therefore female characters can become empowered and liberated through performing it. This will become especially relevant in Chapter 8, which will in part discuss the increasing prevalence of female action heroines with reference to the work of Inness (2004) and Brown (2004).

Before discussing “TG” media’s portrayal of masculinity with reference to Flanagan and Garber, it should be noted that, while the above examples are women performing masculine tasks while also appearing as hyperfeminine women, a small number of female-to-male sex-change transformations were found in the project’s “TG” media corpus; only 28 of 545 (>5%). Of these, there are only two instances of a woman becoming a man who has *more* agency than her. The first is a brief flashback in *The Watch*, in which a captive woman is transformed into a physically stronger man who breaks free of their chains with their new

muscles – though this is physical, rather than social; not the agency Flanagan is discussing. The second is the comic *The Pauper and the Princess* (Ian S, 2011), in which a young man and a princess trade bodies so that the man lives the princess' pampered life while the princess can explore the world outside the castle; this is the closest that anything in the project's "TG" media sample comes towards the presentation of agency identified by Flanagan and Garber, although it should be noted that the man playing the role of the princess is not depicted in the way that Flanagan identifies is common to male cross-dressers, instead relishing their new life of luxury and security; this returns to the representation of women and spoiled and pampered, as discussed earlier in this chapter, and in Chapter 3.

What is more pertinent is the way in which the protagonists in the project's "TG" media sample are never shown finding taking on a female role embarrassing, are not inhibited by it, and never struggle with performing such a role; something in stark contrast to Flanagan and Garber's analysis of their non-"TG" texts. While characters may find transformation into a woman to be initially humiliating in some way, they will always come around to preferring it. For example, the comics *Narcissus Twin* (CBlack, 2009) and *Last Penalty* (Infinity Sign & Nate, n.d.), discussed in Chapter 7, feature protagonists who are defined by their masculinity and see women purely as sexual objects to dominate (the protagonist of *Last Penalty* is also explicitly a serial rapist). Upon transforming, both characters are initially horrified at losing their male bodies and being treated like women, but it takes only a brief period of adjustment for them to begin considering their female bodies superior, never wanting to change back. Other transformed characters simply take it in their stride without much comment, such as the secret agents Glock and Tiel from *The*

*Watch*, discussed earlier in this chapter, or the knights in *Witchwood* (Blackshirtboy, 2011a), who treat becoming female sex slaves as just one in a series of mild annoyances. Many “TG” protagonists, though, find being a woman *less* humiliating than being a man; Chapter 7 is entirely dedicated to such stories, in which a man is initially rejected by those around him, but following a “TG” transformation, finds they are now the popular one. *The Watch* even features a character, Jason, who so much enjoys the popularity and social power his (occasional and temporary) female self has over his male self that he buys “Sonja” her own wardrobe of revealing clothing.

More interesting is the way in which previously male characters in “TG” media do not struggle to put on a convincing performance of femininity. As discussed in Chapter 3, Flanagan (2007) notes that cross-dressing men are almost always depicted as comically inept at playing the part of a woman, and that this serves the purpose of demonstrating that masculinity is so powerful a force that it cannot ever be fully subsumed by passive, weak femininity. Garber (1992/2001) notes as well that cross-dressing men are treated as objects of ridicule who cannot make for convincing women, in her case because femininity is seen as something innate to women’s bodies (recalling the discussion of Ortner in Chapter 3), while masculinity is something men must construct through proving themselves. “TG” media, however, has its male characters master performing femininity either instantly or with only a minute amount of practice. The previously hypermasculine protagonist of *Narcissus Twin* (CBlack, 2009) need only swallow their pride and play with cosmetics and dresses overnight in order to go from an aggressive, sullen slob to a flirtatious, cleavage-baring seductress in stiletto heels, while the body-swapped protagonist of *Playing the Part* (Sturkwurk & Femur, 2011) finds their new female body comes subconsciously “scripted”



with feminine behaviours that slowly take over. The protagonist of *Daddy's Prom* (Infinity Sign & Christie, 2014), transformed from a middle-aged man into a twenty year old woman, becomes so desirable after a single trip to the mall to buy new clothing that they unwittingly steal their daughter's fiancé, while transformed men quickly become professional models and strippers in *The Assault* (Sturkwurk & Nimeyal, 2014), *Opposite Effect* (Infinity Sign, 2012), *Poster Girl* (CBlack, 2012) and *Anniversary in Vegas* (CBlack, 2008). This representation of femininity as "natural" is in line with Garber's observation about women being seen as "becoming" through their biology, although it should be noted that there are four (<1%) narratives in the project's "TG" media corpus which depict similarly desirable, feminine men who cross-dress. These comics – *Complex Eve* (Infinity Sign, 2007c), *Gun Moll* (Wright 2014), *TS, I Love You* (Sakkat, 2012b) and *Doki Doki Crossdressing Date* (Sakkat, 2012a) – all hinge on a cross-dressing man being able to convincingly play the part of a highly desirable woman, not the incompetent jokes that Flanagan and Garber detail, or the mockery of femininity suggested by Phillips (2006). It is also notable that femininity is not represented as constraining or limiting, as in the cross-dressing narratives discussed by Flanagan and Garber.

What the above discussion of cross-dressing in "TG" media also highlights is that, were other "TG" protagonists capable of such "flawless" acts of cross-dressing, their complete physical transformation would not be necessary, suggesting Kessler & McKenna's "cultural genitals" have a role to play. As established in Chapter 5, while sex and nudity are not *rare* in "TG" media, they do not feature in the majority of the "TG" media in the project's corpus, and certain "TG" websites make a point of reassuring their audience that they contain only "fun" content with no sexual material. If the protagonists of these "fun"

examples of “TG” media were able to affect as convincing a disguise as those of *Complex Eve* and *Doki Doki Crossdressing Date*, the narratives would remain almost identical, as they hinge entirely on the protagonists being treated by others as though they are women. This is true even of some “TG” media narratives which do feature sexual content. For example, while the protagonist of *The Gallery* does have explicit sexual encounters post-transformation, the story itself is about how a man’s opinions on art are not taken as seriously as a woman’s, and this aspect would not be altered were the sex scenes removed. This suggests that, in the majority of “TG” media, what is being “really” being transformed is the characters’ cultural genitals; the sex attributed to them socially.

### “TG” Media and Ontologies of Gender

The portrayal of gender in the project’s corpus of “TG” media is contradictory, representing femininity and masculinity as being constituted in completely different ways, rather than as “gender”. Trans\* people, as discussed both earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 5, are also ignored, with “TG” media instead depicting cisgender men who discover they prefer being women *after* being transformed. The representations of masculinity and femininity both echo the backlash grievances of the antifeminists quoted both earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 3, as well as being diametrically opposed to the feminist analyses of gender quoted in those same chapters.

“TG” media’s representation of femininity is deeply essentialist, and presented as emanating “naturally” from female bodies, with no indication that it must be consciously

performed by women, or that this performance is regulated by society's demands. This was discussed in part earlier in this chapter, with reference to the depiction of cross-dressing; men who transform into women take on a highly feminine form of gender expression either instantly or within a very short timeframe, and this performance is never subject to failure once adopted. While Butler (1990/1999) argues that gender is not simply an imitation, but an imitation of something which never existed to begin with, in "TG" media heterosexual femininity is so natural to women that it is instantly embodied without conscious effort; recently transformed characters find themselves loving dresses in *Playing the Part*, becoming addicted to shopping in *The Watch*, affecting a "bimbo" persona in *The Assault*, and flattering men in *Rabbit's Foot*. Furthermore, there is no representation of femininity as something created by men in order to serve patriarchy; it is sometimes an indulgence, recalling the "choice" discourse and antifeminist rhetoric around coddled women discussed in Chapter 3, and other times a means to entrap and manipulate men, which will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Also notable is the degree of control some transformed characters are depicted as having over the way in which they embody femininity. The protagonist of *Vixodus* (Infinity Sign, 2009c) is not only transformed from a skinny teenage boy into a statuesque female superheroine, but also gains the ability to change minor aspects of their appearance, like glasses, hair colour, and clothing on a whim. In *Taboo Beauty* (Infinity Sign, 2007b), a man is cursed to not simply become a woman, but become a woman whose body conforms to the sexual desires to anyone who looks at them, endlessly transforming from idealised body to idealised body. A similar situation affects the protagonist of *The Wish* (Seer Coltz, 2011),

whose body can copy that of any woman they focus on, but cannot become male. A similar power is used consciously by the recurring “TG” character Mr Fugly, a pot-bellied male nerd who attends video game conventions by first transforming into a series of flawless human recreations of female video game characters whose virtual bodies verge on physically impossible. *Mukowski, P.I.* climaxes in a similar fashion, with the protagonist realising that their shape-shifting powers can be used to become any man’s ideal woman in order to manipulate them, and that this is preferable to their former life as a private investigator. Not only can a performance of femininity not fail, it can also be exchanged for another, flawless performance on a whim, further representing femininity as “natural”, as well as echoing the fixation on women’s “choices” around the performance of femininity, discussed in Chapter 3. The singular instance of femininity “failing” in the project’s corpus occurs in the comic *Cheap Motel*, in which an overweight man willingly transforms into a woman to try and be more popular, but remains overweight as a woman, which they are less than pleased with (it is worth noting that *Cheap Motel*’s transformation is presented as a comedic surprise that inverts the “expected” transformation, and that it ends with the transformed characters announcing that they going to try transforming again in order to “fix” things).

“TG” media’s representation of masculinity, however, is fraught with insecurity, paranoia and constant failure. Rather than the effortless, natural femininity discussed above, masculinity in “TG” media is far more suggestive of Butler’s performativity, with men doomed to endless failed iterations on a masculine ideal which remains forever beyond their grasp. Men fail to embody masculinity because their bodies are too fat (*Temazcal*,

*Cheap Motel, Playing the Part, Sunday in the Park with Peri*), too thin (*Vixodus, Speed Date, Complex Eve*), too old (*Daddy's Prom, 44 Minutes to Midnight, The Watch*), disabled (*The Black Rabbit*) or cartoonishly ugly (*The Reign of Cruella*). Even a masculine body is not enough, however, with men frustrated that they occupy subordinate positions which do not command respect and status, like janitors (*The Watch*), anonymous office workers (*Hard-Core Slacker*), service industry workers (*Pizza Dude*), the unemployed (*BFFs*), the homeless (*Champagne Wishes*), petty criminals (*Rabbit's Foot*) and prisoners (*Last Penalty*). Still other men fail to embody masculinity through displaying "feminine" interests (*The Gallery, Bus Stop, The Watch*) or simply being "nerds" (*Rabbit's Foot, The Watch, Vixodus*), while others are *too* masculine, becoming isolated from the people around them while trying to live up to an ideal (*Paradox Alice, The Hit Girl, Last Penalty, Narcissus Twin*).

Compared to the earlier discussion of "TG" media's portrayal of femininity, the contrast is stark. The constant failure to correctly embody masculinity is reminiscent of not only Butler, but Garber's (1992/2001) argument that masculinity must be actively created by a subject, rather than femininity, which exists passively in the body. It is arguably closer to Garber than Butler, given that some men in "TG" media – just not the *protagonists* – are seen to embody masculinity correctly, suggesting that such an "authentic" gender embodiment is possible within "TG", and the protagonists are simply incapable, and thus must be transformed. This itself recalls the arguments cited in Chapter 3 which conceptualise femininity as what is *not* masculinity; if these characters fail at being masculine, then they must symbolically be feminine – this symbolic femininity will be discussed with reference not just to Connell (1995), but also Pascoe's (2007) ethnographic

study of gendered insults among teenagers, in Chapter 7. Connell's (1995) model of hegemonic and subordinated masculinities is also of use here, with many of the "TG" narratives in the corpus depicting conflicts between protagonists who embody subordinated forms and an antagonist who embodies the hegemonic form. "TG" media, of course, resolves this conflict by transforming the subordinated character into a woman, which is depicted as freeing them from the subordinate position. That femininity is always subordinate to masculinity, even subordinate forms of masculinity, is not considered; "TG" media suggests that security and pleasure are derived from a perfect balance of exaggerated binary gender stereotypes that benefit both men and women, and anything that falls outside of this is a failure.

Trans\* subjectivities, as discussed earlier in both this chapter and Chapter 5, are almost entirely absent from "TG" media; rather, there are cisgender male subjectivities who somehow turn into women and subsequently discover that is preferable to being a man. Along with the way in which "TG" media represents women as "naturally" hyperfeminine stereotypes, this is suggestive of the anti-trans\* works by Raymond (1979) and Jeffreys (2014) cited in Chapter 3, which argue that trans women are simply men who willingly adopt exaggerated, stereotypically feminine behaviour for the benefit of other men, and whose male upbringing means they cannot identify with the struggles of women. While, as the responses in Chapter 3 demonstrated, this is not an accurate representation of real life trans\* people, it does serve as a reasonably accurate description of many "TG" protagonists. For example, the "TG" comic *Rabbit's Foot* centres on two petty criminals who suffer at the hands of a local gang leader. After a "TG" transformation, however, both adopt an

exaggerated performance of femininity in order to please him, calling him pet names, wearing revealing clothing and indulging his desire to have sex with multiple women at once. A similar transformation occurs in *The Watch*, in which a male janitor is transformed into a woman and instantly begins behaving in a submissive, sexualised way towards a male wizard who treats them as a servant. When offered the chance to turn back, the former janitor refuses, much preferring the life of a sexual object controlled by a powerful man. Many other stories following this pattern are found in “TG” media, and will be discussed in Chapters 7 and 8. This choice to perform an exaggerated form of femininity for the benefit of other men and remaining aligned entirely with male interests is consistent with the characterisation of trans women in the work of Raymond and Jeffreys and, as the central critique of their work is that they dismiss trans\* subjectivities in favour of their own assumptions, is also consistent with “TG” media’s disinterest in trans\* characters. This is not to argue that “TG” media is informed by anti-trans\* feminists, but rather that “TG” media reproduces a reactionary approach to gender which anti-trans\* feminists feared trans women would ultimately embody.

### “TG” and Social Inversion?

On the basis of the above analysis of “TG” media, this project argues that the best way in which to understand its conceptualisation of gender is through what the project terms “Social Inversions”. If “TG” is a genre, as was argued in Chapter 2, then the content analysis discussed in Chapter 5 shows that it displays no consistent use of settings, character archetypes, sexual content, LGBT themes, dramatic tone, art style or plot structure. What

was consistent, however, was the ways in which a physical transformation functioned to reconfigure how a character was treated socially; a theme which has recurred throughout this chapter. Furthermore, the social transformation takes the form of an inversion, changing a character's social position to its opposite, an approach which is consistent with "TG" media's representation of gender as a naturally occurring binary opposition which cannot be transcended.

For example, the "TG" comics *Playing the Part* (Sturkwurk & Femur 2011) and *A Midwinter Fantasy* (Mentalcrash, 2012) have little in common superficially. *Playing the Part* uses 3D computer rendered artwork, features explicit sex scenes and coarse language, and its protagonist is an ageing alcoholic who begins the story by dying in a car accident. *A Midwinter Fantasy*, in contrast, uses traditional 2D artwork, features no sex or nudity, is self-consciously "cute", and its protagonist is a younger adult man who becomes a happy schoolgirl thanks to a genie granting their wish. When looked at in terms of Social Inversion, however, both are remarkably similar: the protagonists are both adult men who feel that the responsibilities of adulthood have crushed the joy out of them and left them isolated, and long for a happier, simpler life without these such responsibilities, which is then provided for them via a "TG" transformation. The protagonist of *Playing the Part* becomes a newlywed bride who finds their new life of domesticity and sex to be less of a hassle than their old male career, and the protagonist of *A Midwinter Fantasy* becomes a carefree schoolgirl who can skip down the street with their best friend rather than worry about deadlines and overtime. The *social* situation of the protagonist is *inverted*: isolation becomes a close relationship, a dead end becomes a new beginning, and the responsibilities of adult life become carefree simplicity.



Following this identification of Social Inversion as a recurring theme, the project grouped the narratives into categories in which the protagonist's social situation was inverted in a similar way, eg. Unpopular to popular, ignored to the centre of attention, low self-esteem to high self-esteem, poor to rich, single to partnered, and so on. This showed that 149 of the 545 narratives (>27%) were consistent with Social Inversion. However, this number takes into account *all* narratives in the corpus, over half of which are identified by the creators as simply "sequences" or "fillers", rather than fully-formed narratives. After removing all the *TG Comics (and Stories)* comics designated "Sequences" or "Story Panels", all of *The Watch* comics designated "Fillers", the number of "TG" media narratives featuring Social Inversion became 129 of 228; over half (>56%). Furthermore, this >56% figure only takes into account what is *explicitly addressed* in these "TG" texts, with other "TG" texts able to fit into the Social Inversion model through inference. For example, the short "TG" film *The Company Dress Code* (Mako, 2014) features an overweight, middle-aged man transforming into a young woman in a "sexy Santa" costume and commenting on how good their new body looks and feels, before going to work for Santa at the North Pole. While no explicit Social Inversion is addressed and we learn nothing about the protagonist prior to their transformation, the transformation can still be safely assumed to have radically altered their life, and their constant giggling and moaning suggests they consider it an improvement.

This project argues that Social Inversion accounts for the popularity of "TG" media; the physical transformation of its characters from male to female allows them to address social problems in their lives that the "TG" media creators and audience view as both

inescapable and specific to men. By addressing such social problems through physical transformation, the problems are resolved by altering the characters so that they are no longer required to behave in accordance with the expectations of masculinity, while masculinity, binary gender roles and patriarchy themselves remain unchallenged and are represented as natural. In order to better address Social Inversion as a theme, the “TG” narratives being analysed were divided into three broad categories based on the kind of Social Inversion identified.

### **Social Inversion 1: Rejected to Desired**

Narratives in which the protagonist’s behaviour falls outside of the boundaries of what is acceptable. He may be physically weak, oversensitive emotionally, a criminal, unattractive, submissive, boring, or any number of markers of failed masculinity. Because of this, he becomes a pariah, treated a failed man by both men and women. After transforming from male to female, however, they find that these negative traits are no longer a problem. In some cases, this is because what is seen as unacceptable for a man becomes acceptable in a woman, such as submissiveness, being conscious of one’s body, or emotional openness. In other cases, it is because these traits are represented as only occurring in men, and are thus “purged” by the transformation, such as an overweight male slob becoming a woman who effortlessly embodies hyperfemininity.

## **Social Inversion 2: Restrained to Free**

The protagonist's problem here is the opposite of the above inversion, as he performs masculinity "too well", repressing any desires which may lead to him behaving in ways that would lead to a Rejected to Desired situation. While not treated poorly by others for his failure to correctly embody masculinity, however, he is an incomplete person; he is unable to express emotion, form close friendships, or even enjoy life, as he is too busy policing himself and trying to live up to a masculine ideal. He may be successful, like the celebrity pin-up astronaut in *Paradox Alice*, or a miserable nobody like the janitor in *The Watch*, but neither side leads to a life they are fully happy with, and they yearn for more. After transforming from male to female, however, they learn to reconnect with that which they had suppressed and set aside the demands they placed on themselves, becoming a complete human being.

## **Social Inversion 3: Ordinary to Supernatural**

In these narratives, the protagonist's male body is presented as a barrier between them and the supernatural world. In order to access these powers, such as witchcraft, vampirism, being "at one" with nature, and occasionally alien super powers, the protagonist must transform their body from male to female. This is the least common inversion, but is worthy of a chapter based on its specific focus on the nature of the female body. Each of these three inversions will now receive their own chapter, complete with a review of additional literature. After these three chapters, a conclusion will follow in Chapter 10. As with the superficial content of the project's corpus, the quantitative information related to

Social Inversion, complete with synopses of “TG” narratives, was also tabulated and is available in the Appendix B. The Social Inversion content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* is in Tables B1 to B4; Social Inversion content of *The Watch* is in Tables B5 and B6; Social Inversion content of *The Siren’s Song* and *Miss Mako* videos is in Table B7; and the Social Inversion of *Three Degrees Off Center* videos is in Table B8.

## 7. SOCIAL INVERSION 1: REJECTED TO DESIRED

In the 545 “TG” media narratives in the project’s corpus, the Rejected to Desired Social Inversion occurred sixty times, making it the most common form of Social Inversion. As discussed in the project’s introduction, a Rejected to Desired narrative is one in which a male character finds himself in a social situation in which he is unwanted, marginalised or vilified, but then undergoes a “TG” transformation and discovers that they are now accepted, even celebrated, often by the same people or institutions who had earlier rejected them.

However, in spite of this consistent narrative thread running through them, these Rejected to Desired stories are not a monolith, and represent rejection and desire in different ways. For this reason, the “TG” narratives discussed below have been broken down into three Rejected to Desired sub-categories which place a greater emphasis on *how* and *why* these male characters become more acceptable after their transformation, with each sub-category informed by its own theoretical framework. These are Acceptance Through Male Reverence for Female Beauty, in which male characters become female and are depicted as celebrated

for their adherence to female beauty rituals; Acceptance through Assumed Female Privileges, in which male characters become female and are depicted as receiving preferential treatment simply because they are female; and Acceptance into Hierarchy through Emphasised Femininity, in which male characters become female and are depicted as having escaped a previously oppressive, hierarchical relationship they had with other men. While each section will include its own analysis of the relevant literature, the central argument of this part of the project is that Rejected to Desired texts represent the intersection of two discourses which, because they apply to all the following stories in some way, will be discussed prior to the analysis of specific “TG” media texts. These are, broadly, the belief that men who fail to act in a sufficiently masculine way are somehow symbolically feminine, and the belief that women innately receive preferential treatment.

The belief among men, present especially in male bonding rituals, that to fail to measure up to the standards of masculinity is to symbolically become female, has been widely documented in sociology literature dealing with masculinity. As CJ Pascoe observes in her ethnographic study of American adolescent boys, *Dude, You’re a Fag* (2007), the threat of perceived association with femininity functions as a ‘disciplinary mechanism [...] central to the formation of a gendered identity for boys in a way that it is not for girls’ (Pascoe, 2007, pp. 53 – 54). R.W. Connell, as discussed in Chapter 3, makes a similar observation in *Masculinities* (1995/2005), noting that young men who fail to correctly embody masculinity are met with ‘a rich vocabulary of abuse: wimp, milksop, nerd, sissy [...] panty-waist, mother’s boy, four eyes [...] the symbolic blurring with femininity is obvious’ (Connell, 1995/2005, p. 79). Pascoe further expands on this, citing the centrality of the insult ‘fag’, a word which is usually taken to simply mean “homosexual” but is, in adolescent male

discourse, the symbol of a more complex 'specter' (Pascoe, 2007, p.54) haunting any male who is seen as 'failing at the masculine tasks of competence, heterosexual prowess, and strength, or in any way revealing weakness or femininity' (ibid). Such a symbolic association between femininity and failed masculinity is a feasible explanation for the anxieties that these narratives are articulating. If the protagonist's behaviour were seen as somehow *innately* dangerous or anti-social, then the transformation from male to female would not result in them suddenly becoming accepted by the same people who had previously rejected them. Instead, the behaviour is represented in a highly gendered way; an acceptable part of being a woman, but symptomatic of failure for a man. Because this failed masculinity is also a successful femininity, however, the transformation from male to female resolves this contradiction between the protagonist's biological sex and their behaviour, rendering them acceptable to heteronormative patriarchy by reifying their symbolic femininity.

However, the representation of the preferential treatment the protagonist receives after becoming female does not stem solely from the association between failed masculinity and successful femininity, but also from the belief that women simply receive preferential treatment as a matter of course. This belief, which is a core component of antifeminist Men's Rights literature, already discussed in Chapter 3, forms the second half of the Rejected to Desired framework. Through a combination of essentialised sex appeal and institutionalised political correctness, it is argued, women occupy a position where they rarely, if ever, fail to get their own way, especially when competing against men. In the men's rights book *The Myth of Male Power* (Farrell, 1993/1994), Warren Farrell argues that women receive far more preferential treatment than men because they possess a passive

quality he terms 'genetic celebrity' (Farrell, 1993/1994, p. 166), which contrasts with men's active 'earned celebrity' (ibid). While men's success is a reward that reflects their proficiencies at socialising, courtship and career advancement - 'performing, pursuing and paying' (ibid) – women succeed through their looks, which are, Farrell argues, derived primarily from their genes rather than their behaviour. The end result of this imbalance is that a woman 'has, *on average*, less demand to perform and more resources to attract love [...] her body and mind are more genetic gifts' (ibid, emphasis in original).

Later chapters of *The Myth of Male Power* further expand on the social applications of genetic celebrity, as Farrell argues that women's sex appeal is a form of legal, institutionally protected bribery that women can use to their advantage without fear of repercussion: '[C]ome hither looks are the equivalent of flashing hundred-dollar bills [...] even a woman "charming her way" into permission to turn in an exam late (the "charm" being a hint of sex) is [...] a form of sexual bribery' (p. 302), all of which is 'free of risk' (p. 300). Even when a woman is not overtly using her genetic celebrity to get her own way, argues Farrell, it continues to function due to institutionalised fear of appearing misogynist by engaging in anything that might be interpreted as 'creat[ing] a "hostile environment" for a woman' (p. 303). Men are rendered powerless before women, being 'fearful of a shouting match' (ibid), while the media promotes 'images of Dianas versus Goliaths' (ibid) which position women as perpetual victims, collectively deserving of special treatment and absolved of responsibility. It is this ideology, which positions men as victims of an anti-male culture that expects too much from them while celebrating women for simply being women – such as *The War Against Boys* and *Save the Males*, discussed in Chapter 3, and also the legal cases of Roy Dean Hollander, discussed in the following chapter with reference to *Rave*

*New World* - that forms the second component of these narratives: it is not just that the protagonist's failed masculinity becomes a successful femininity, but that their successful femininity means always getting what they want.

The argument put forth in the following chapter, across multiple sections, is that the anxieties that these Rejected to Desired narratives are articulating exist at points of intersection between these two ideologies. The degrees to which each narrative is influenced by either ideology differs from case to case, with some focusing heavily on one aspect and others falling somewhere in between the two. This chapter will analyse fifteen exemplar Rejected to Desired narratives grouped into three sub-categories based on what was considered their most salient theme, beginning with "Acceptance Through Male Reverence for Female Beauty".

## ACCEPTANCE THROUGH MALE REVERENCE FOR FEMALE BEAUTY

This chapter will address three "TG" media texts, which will be analysed together, as they all focus on characters whose failed masculinity becomes a successful femininity as a result of them focusing on the appearance, specifically the sexual attractiveness, of their transformed bodies. These three texts, *Narcissus Twin* (CBlack, 2009), *Temazcal* (Kannel, 2014a) and *BFF: Best Friends Forever* (TG Tony, 2010) articulate gendered anxieties surrounding how men relate to the concept of physical beauty in both men and women. This analysis understands these narratives by drawing on a variety of theorists who hold differing viewpoints on the modern conception of physical beauty, from the feminist stance



that the beauty industry is a form of patriarchal oppression designed to constrain women psychologically, to the opposite end of the spectrum, the antifeminist stance which views beauty as a form of social power that the beauty industry exists to help women develop.

The analysis ultimately finds that these three texts are attempting to reconcile a contradictory situation, in which men are exposed to the messages of a powerful and omnipresent female beauty industry that represents beauty as a way for women to personally empower themselves, while these men simultaneously attempt to correctly embody masculinity, which views a focus on one's physical beauty as a sign of deviance and inferiority. As a result, the protagonists of these stories are depicted as men who covet physical beauty because they believe it will grant them the social advantages that the beauty industry promises to grant women, but cannot engage in these feminine beauty rituals while male, necessitating their transformation from male to female. This chapter begins with a simultaneous analysis of the comics *Narcissus Twin* and *Temazcal*, which deal primarily with the connection between physical beauty and narcissism, before moving on to the comic *BFF: Best Friends Forever*, which represents female beauty and sexuality as a form of capital that women have the unique ability to invest in.

#### 'Back in center stage where I belong': Gendered Representations of Narcissism

*Narcissus Twin* and *Temazcal* will be discussed simultaneously due to the ways in which each narrative depicts its male protagonist as somehow aberrant due to their obsession with their physical appearance, and how this is resolved by transforming their body from male to female. The protagonist of *Narcissus Twin*, TJ, is a young college student

and self-proclaimed 'buff-ass stud' (CBlack, 2009, p. 18) who spends his days at the gym working on his muscular physique rather than attending class, and believes that his social isolation is the result of his body being so perfect that other people find him intimidating – the reality, however, is that his obsession with his body above all else simply makes him a vacuous, self-obsessed bore with no prospects outside of the gym, with even his best friend Eric despairingly asking 'don't you ever leave this place?' (p. 29). The unnamed protagonist of *Temazcal* demonstrates a similar level of self-obsession, although in his case he loathes his body rather than loving it, obsessing over his weight. Taking part in 'some kind of Mesoamerican ceremony' (Kannel, 2014a, p. 1) that requires him to strip down to his underwear along with a group of other men, he is immediately consumed with self-consciousness over how he does not measure up to them physically, dwelling on how it 'really sucks' (ibid) to be 'the only overweight person here' (ibid). He is so 'embarrassed about [his] flabby body' (ibid) and 'tits' (ibid) that, when the room begins to fill with smoke and he worries he may suffocate, he takes solace in the fact that at least nobody can see him. In both narratives, the tension created by the protagonist's obsession with his appearance is ultimately resolved not by having the protagonist overcome this obsession, but by transforming them from male to female. By transforming from male to female, however, this tension is resolved, as being so defined by one's appearance and sexual attractiveness conflicts with masculinity, but is an expected part of femininity. This will be demonstrated by drawing on literature concerning the expectation that women are obsessed with their appearances in a way that men are not, and follow this up with further analysis of the ways in which this expected obsession is presented as not simply acceptable behaviour, but a fulfilling and empowering aspect of being a woman.

Returning to Pascoe's US study, *Dude, You're a Fag*, it becomes apparent that a boy who fixates on his appearance is in danger of failing to perform masculinity correctly, as 'only fags cared how they looked' (Pascoe, 2007, p. 70). Another series of interviews with adolescent boys, this time from the UK, presented in *Young Masculinities: Understanding Boys in Contemporary Society* (Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman, 2001), has boys explain their conception of girls' fixation on their looks at length: 'Girls take ages to get ready, boys are just ready' (p. 102); 'Girls put on tons of make up, boys just like to be neat and clean' (ibid); 'Girls want to make themselves look big by spending so much money on clothes, [boys] just wear designer labels and jeans' (ibid). The authors' analysis of the boys' interview responses found that 'though the same boys also spoke [...] about the various designer labels they wore, they positioned themselves as not obsessed by their looks [...] [t]hey thus constructed themselves as more active than girls in the sense of not being tied down by their looks' (ibid). In this analysis, a man does not fail at masculinity simply if he looks good or takes pride in his appearance, but if his focus on his appearance is seen to take precedence over other aspects of his life; the authors note this with reference to how often the boys interviewed defined themselves as 'just' making an effort to look good by staying neat and wearing fashionable clothing labels, differentiating themselves from girls who expended more time, energy and money on their appearances than the boys deemed necessary. While the protagonists of *Narcissus Twin* and *Temazcal* do not go so far as to worry about clothing and makeup – while male, at least – the degree to which they are fixated on their appearance is far beyond the accepted boundaries of "normal" masculinity, and warrants further analysis, which can be understood in relation to Sandra Lee Bartky's analysis in *Femininity and Domination* (1990/2011).

Rejecting Freud's psychoanalytic explanation for female narcissism on the grounds that it relies on 'questionable theoretical constructions' (Bartky, 1990/2011, p. 40) such as death instinct and penis envy, Bartky chooses to approach female narcissism from an existential perspective, focusing instead on 'the cognizance of women's situation' (p. 41). 'Knowing that she is to be subjected to the cold appraisal of the male connoisseur and that her life prospects may depend on how she is seen, the woman learns to appraise herself [...] the gaze of the Other is internalized so that I become once seer and seen, appraiser and the thing appraised' (p. 38), something echoed in Mulvey (1989)'s discussion of women as defined by the male gaze, which 'projects its phantasy on to the female which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed' (Mulvey, 1989 p. 19). The description of woman as 'seer and seen, appraiser and the thing appraised' is an apt description of both narratives' protagonists when male *and* female, with the difference being that, upon becoming female, their self-consciousness becomes an acceptable personality trait rather than a source of conflict. TJ and the unnamed protagonist of *Temazcal* both *assume* that their male bodies are constantly subject to the appraisal of Bartky's 'connoisseurs', although this is not depicted as strictly true within the narratives themselves: The only character in *Narcissus Twin* to show any interest in TJ's male physique is TJ, with other characters rebuffing and ignoring him, while the protagonist of *Temazcal* simply assumes his male body is judged to be unattractive and unmasculine by those around him, even though they do not appear to actually notice he exists until after his transformation from male to female. So much is 'the gaze of the Other [...] internalized' in either protagonist that he does not need to be *told* that his body is being judged for him to become conscious of its positive and negative aesthetic characteristics, because he is always imagining himself being looked at. If this is the same mindset that

Bartky identifies specifically as 'women's situation', then both TJ and the protagonist of *Temazcal* have, because of their obsession with their appearances, failed to correctly embody masculinity. Before discussing the ways in which their transformation from male to female allows them to escape this failure, however, it is necessary to discuss what has led to each character becoming so obsessed with his appearance to begin with.

*Narcissus Twin* openly addresses the root cause of TJ's behaviour by having Eric, his best friend, directly explain it to Hilary, Eric's sister: 'This last semester here was tough for him! Back at high school he was always the top dog, the popular guy... but now he's just another fish in a big pond. He misses being the center of attention and is just reacting to it the only way he knows how' (CBlack, 2009, pp. 69 – 70). I wish to analyse this – admittedly brief – character motivation by returning to Connell's *Masculinities*, specifically its development of the "Hegemonic Masculinity" model. I will expand on Hegemonic Masculinity at length in the following chapter, but what is immediately relevant to TJ's situation is that the Hegemonic Masculinity model recognises that there is no single static "masculinity", but rather a series of dominant hegemonic forms of masculinity which vary from environment to environment, with men being judged on how successfully they embody those forms. In TJ's case, he appears to have successfully embodied a simplified, adolescent hegemonic form while in high school, lacking academic aptitude and social skills, but compensating by simply being physically large and muscular. This is in line with the observations about adolescent hegemonic masculinity made in *Young Masculinities: Understanding Boys in Contemporary Society* that one of the 'canonical narratives about masculinity' (Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman, 2001, p. 77) in a high school context is that 'Popular masculinity involves 'hardness', sporting prowess [...] casual treatment of schoolwork and

being adept at “cussing”, dominance and control’ (ibid). In the adult world, however, this form of masculinity is failing him; he needs social skills and a more rigorous work ethic to navigate college life, but has failed to develop them. From this perspective, TJ’s retreat from the world around him into the gym and obsession with his muscles could be understood as a retreat from adulthood back to his adolescence, as he tries to recapture a simpler time in his life when the hegemonic form of masculinity, and its social benefits, was something he could more easily embody.

The anxiety dogging the protagonist of *Temazcal* is depicted as something far more straightforward: he is obsessed with the fact that his male body is fat, soft and rounded, which differentiates his body from the male bodies around him, which are uniformly depicted as slim, broad-shouldered and with well-defined muscle tone. His own internal monologue explicitly distances his body from men and associates it with women, as he laments that it’s ‘Not like there are any women around. Wish there were... so I wouldn’t be the only one with tits’ (Kannel, 2014a, p. 1). Unlike TJ, who willingly embraces obsessing over his body because he has failed to move past an adolescent conception of masculinity, the protagonist of *Temazcal* is obsessed because he sees his body as unmasculine, and thus the cause of his failure to correctly embody masculinity. In the cases of both protagonists, it is not simply that they are unmasculine because they find themselves exhibiting the traits that Bartky identifies as feminine, but that they exhibit these traits because their embodiment of masculinity was already failing.

Prior to their transformation, neither character acknowledges that being female would solve their problems, and the transformation is involuntarily forced upon them

through supernatural means (a witch's curse in *Narcissus Twin* and a woman who appears in a dream in *Temazcal*). Both characters are also initially horrified by the physical changes, denying that they are female and refusing to let go of their male identities. TJ's immediate reaction is to demand that he and Eric 'find that old bat [the witch who cursed him] and make her change me back!' (CBlack, 2009, p. 63) and angrily responding to Eric referring to him as female with 'I'm not a chick, goddammit! [...] I am no fuckin' chick! You got that?!' (p. 93). The protagonist of *Temazcal*, face to face with the dream woman who is transforming him, pleads with her to 'Please... make... these tits disappear!' (Kannell, 2014a, p. 4) and refuses to acknowledge his new breasts feel good because 'I'm a guy!!!!' (p. 5). Not long after their transformation from male to female, however, both protagonists find that their female bodies resolve their tension over being male subjects who are also Bartky's 'seer and seen', with their obsession over their bodies becoming acceptable when the body in question is female. Following this, it is not long before both characters realise that not only are they simply "not wrong" for obsessing over their female bodies, but that they are actively rewarded for doing so and begin to find it enjoyable, fulfilling and personally empowering. This analysis will now engage with the reactionary belief in the "power" of female beauty over men, something these narratives both assume and perpetuate.

TJ initially reacts angrily to being Bartky's 'thing appraised'. When Eric tells TJ that he finds TJ's female body is attractive, TJ snaps back with 'Hey, fuck you, man!' (CBlack, 2009, p. 129), and says that wearing tight gym clothes while female makes them 'fe[el] like a piece of fucking meat' (p. 145). Despite their misgivings, TJ is eventually coaxed into getting a feminine makeover involving cosmetics, high heels and revealing clothing, although they still react with anger when Eric calls them 'a knockout' (p. 168). It is not until TJ catches a

glimpse of their reflection in a store window and realises that 'guys are gonna drool over me' (p. 194) that they begin flaunting their body to get what they want, saying that they 'know just how to play it' (p. 195) and are 'just giving them what they want' (p. 207). When TJ sees how popular their female body is making them, TJ realises that they are 'back in center stage where I belong' (p. 285) and has 'every other guy on campus wrapped around my finger' (p. 282), eventually releasing a series of highly lucrative internet sex videos. When given the opportunity to change back, TJ refuses, explaining 'Look at me! I'm hot, sexy, and the most popular chick on campus... and more! That's more than old TJ can claim!' (p. 391). Ultimately, *Narcissus Twin* depicts TJ's eventual embrace of highly sexualised femininity as a way for them to regain the popularity and influence they had lost upon leaving high school, and also that this femininity allows them to do so *without* having to address their selfishness and immaturity.

The protagonist of *Temazcal* is quicker to adapt, which is unsurprising given that he begins the story already hating his male body and wanting to be rid of it (though this is explicitly due to his weight, not his maleness). Over the course of their transformation, the negative aspects of the male body they are self-conscious about are reconfigured by the dream woman into aspects of a female body that command positive attention. They are told to 'just love' (Kannel, 2014a, p. 5) their flabby chest as it transforms into a pair of breasts, and to appreciate their 'big round ass' (p. 6) and 'hips to bear children' (p. 5). 'The boys will be all over you!!! And I know you will love it!' (p. 6), the dream woman reassures the protagonist, before the transformation ends. Surrounded again by the men whose attention they desperately sought initially to avoid, the protagonist now enjoys their stares and comments, with one man calling them 'a cute little doll' (p. 9) and another encouraging



them not to be 'shy' (ibid). The protagonist then announces 'It's about time I start enjoying life!!!' (p. 10), poses seductively and tells the men 'Don't keep me waiting. Who is gonna be first?' (ibid) as they begin taking turns having sexual intercourse with him. Ultimately, the protagonist's embrace of femininity allows them to escape their role as someone who is self-conscious of their unattractiveness and hates being looked at by becoming someone who is self-conscious of their attractiveness and receives positive attention for displaying their body for others. Like TJ, they do not learn to move beyond their self-obsession, but instead transforms into someone for whom self-obsession is acceptable.

If, as occurs in both narratives, these characters overcome their problems through transforming from male to female and then embracing an exaggerated form of heterosexual femininity, then it appears that both stories are informed by an ideology that sees the embrace of femininity as a positive way for women to find fulfilment. Here the project will again return to Bartky, who argues that this association between femininity and personal fulfilment is a cornerstone of what she terms 'the fashion-beauty complex' (Bartky, 1990/2011, p. 39), a name chosen in order to present it as analogous to the series of economic and political relationships that comprise the military-industrial complex. The fashion-beauty complex aims to 'glorify the female body and provide opportunities for narcissistic indulgence' (ibid), through which a woman learns that she can 'become a sex object for herself, taking toward her own person the attitude of a man. She will then take erotic satisfaction in her physical self, revelling in her body as a beautiful object to be gazed at' (p. 36). However, this celebration of the female body, Bartky argues, is only the *overt* form of the fashion-beauty complex, which obscures its more insidious, *covert* purpose, 'which is to depreciate woman's body and deal a blow to her narcissism' (pp. 39 – 40). This

is also an argument made by Banyard in *The Equality Illusion* (2010), discussed in Chapter 3; Banyard uses the example of the cosmetics company L'Oréal, who state they are 'focused on helping women feel more beautiful' (Banyard, 2010, p. 22), profiting from women's insecurities while presenting themselves as magnanimous.

The idealised female bodies which the fashion-beauty complex appears to be celebrating, argues Bartky, are intentionally constructed in such a way as to be unattainable, which creates in women a deep insecurity concerning their appearances: 'We are presented everywhere with images of perfect female beauty [...] these images remind us constantly that we fail to measure up. Whose nose is the right shape, after all, whose hips are not too wide – or too narrow? The female body is revealed as a task, an object in need of transformation' (Bartky, 1990/2011, p. 40). This 'task' and 'transformation' involves women partaking in the beauty rituals that the fashion-beauty complex profits from: 'I must cream my body with a thousand creams, each designed to act against a different deficiency, oil it, pumice it, powder it, shave it, pluck it, depilate it, deodorize it [...] We can now grasp the nature of feminine narcissism with more precision: It is *infatuation with an inferiorized body*' (ibid, emphasis in original). Using Bartky's distinction between the fashion-beauty complex's overt and covert aspects, with a superficial celebration of female bodies masking the desire to create within women a highly profitable insecurity, the beliefs about female beauty articulated by *Narcissus Twin* and *Temazcal* can better understood; both *Narcissus Twin* and *Temazcal* articulate an ideology which is derived solely from what Bartky categorises as the 'overt' function of the fashion-beauty complex, while ignoring entirely its 'covert' functions. In doing so, it also articulates beliefs not unlike those which inform Farrell's concept of 'genetic celebrity', discussed in the chapter's introduction. While the 'images of perfect

female beauty' identified by Bartky are out of reach to women – 'They are images of *what I am not*' (p. 40, emphasis in original) - they are not only well within the grasp of the protagonists of *Narcissus Twin* and *Temazcal*, but can be embodied with little to no effort on their part. After TJ's transformation finishes, all it takes is an (unseen) makeover for their female body to be declared 'a knockout' (CBlack, 2009, p. 168) and, after only one night of enjoying themselves as a woman, they is depicted wearing cosmetics and highly revealing female clothing as if these simply come naturally; going from a man who resents being trapped in a female body to a highly successful 'hot babe' (p. 221) whose sexuality manipulates 'every other guy on campus' (p. 282) literally overnight. The protagonist of *Temazcal* does not even need to worry about cosmetics or fashion to have their female body celebrated; they simply stand naked and their female body is instantly declared a 'cute little doll' (Kannell, 2014a, p. 9) with 'perfect hips' (p. 5), 'a big round ass' (p. 6) and 'huge' breasts (p. 5) that 'the boys will be all over' (p. 8). This attitude towards their female bodies is in line with what Bartky describes in her analysis of the 'overt' fashion-beauty complex; both protagonists quickly learn to take satisfaction in the way their bodies are gazed at and displayed for men's pleasure, treating it as an exciting, empowering experience. But if, as Bartky argues, the 'covert' aim of the fashion-beauty complex is to convince women that their bodies are imperfect, inferior and thus 'in need of transformation' to survive male scrutiny, then *Narcissus Twin* and *Temazcal* not only ignore this aspect of the fashion-beauty complex, but present something approaching its opposite: female bodies do *not* require transformation to be acceptable, and it is the protagonists' male bodies that are depicted as inferior and in need of constant work. This is to be expected from "TG" media's masculinist standpoint, as discussed in Chapter 5; it is able to engage with anxieties surrounding the

embodiment of masculinity, but not comparable anxieties surrounding the embodiment of femininity.

TJ's male body is never depicted as unattractive, with even the characters who can't stand his personality admitting his physique makes him at least superficially attractive to 'the kind of women' (CBlack, 2009, p. 11) he's able to pick up. What is notable is that TJ's physique is not depicted as a natural part of his male body, but as the result of him obsessively sculpting his muscles in the gym, a task depicted as so time-consuming that TJ has almost no life outside of it. Although he is not depicted as being pressured from the outside to sculpt his body this way, TJ's treatment of his body is in line with Bartky's 'tasks', something he constantly scrutinises and works to improve. TJ's female body, on the other hand, requires no such maintenance; outside of his one unseen makeover, TJ is never seen to work on making his female body attractive and never visits the gym again, in stark contrast to the vast amount of time and effort he was required to expend maintaining his physique while male. The male body of the protagonist of *Temazcal* embodies similar anxieties. The protagonist's male body, like TJ's, is in need of work and attention to render it attractively masculine, but he has neglected to work on it, causing it to become flabby, soft and unmasculine. Their female body, again like TJ's, is not shown to require any such work to maintain. Furthermore, the ways in which the protagonists' bodies are transformed actively prevent their new female bodies from failing to meet feminine beauty standards. When TJ's body begins to transform, it first becomes a female version of his male body, complete with a broad frame and large muscles, as if he has been replaced by a hypothetical twin sister. When his transformation completes itself, however, their new female body is so different as to be unrecognisable as TJ, with Eric commenting that this is an improvement

because 'All those muscles looked kind of weird in a chick' (CBlack, 2009, p. 92). *Temazcal* presents a similar scenario, in which the protagonist's transformation not only changes his primary and secondary sexual characteristics, but also causes his body fat to magically vanish, leaving them 'looking hotter now' (Kannel, 2014a, p. 4) even before they complete their transformation. The ideology presented here is not only that of the overt fashion-beauty complex, but also that of Farrell's 'genetic celebrity' and a complete denial of the performative nature of gender, identified by Butler and discussed earlier in the literature review. While female, the protagonists simply possess 'genetic gifts' (Farrell, 1993/1994, p. 166) that give them 'more resources to attract love' (ibid), in stark contrast to the way their male lives revolved around 'performing' (ibid).

Ultimately, both *Narcissus Twin* and *Temazcal* deal with their protagonists' failure to successfully embody masculinity. Rather than have either protagonist overcome their self-obsession, or have the other characters in the narrative accept the protagonists' self-obsession, both narratives choose to resolve their tension by transforming their protagonist's body from male to female. While female, their obsession with their body is no longer problematic, as this obsession is expected from women, as well as promoted and encouraged by the fashion-beauty complex as a kind of personally fulfilling 'celebration' of female bodies. Their transformed bodies are therefore primarily a means of resolving the conflict around the ways in which narcissism is experienced in highly gendered ways, rather than a way of escaping being physically male, and that both comics represent this conflict from a masculinist standpoint that does not take into account issues raised by feminist analysis of narcissism; a key feature of the antifeminist discourses discussed in the introductory chapters. While the feminist analysis quoted specifically situates female

narcissism as a product of women's bodies being objectified and constantly judged, both *Narcissus Twin* and *Temazcal* represent narcissism as simply stemming from excessive self-indulgent vanity regardless of one's sex, and that women being encouraged to focus on their physical appearance is, rather than a form of social control, a freedom which women are granted by society. In this sense, despite superficially depicting sex as malleable, both narratives are highly reactionary and essentialist in their presentation of gender, representing women as rewarded for being shallow and appearance-obsessed, and presenting this not as a function of patriarchy, but as a unique privilege women possess.

Furthermore, the protagonists' new female bodies are depicted as flawlessly embodying an ideal femininity at all times, in contrast to them constantly fretting that their male bodies fail to embody masculinity. This suggests that the narratives view masculinity and femininity as ontological opposites, with masculinity presented as something unnatural that men struggle to maintain, while femininity comes naturally to women, passively emanating from female bodies. When this ideology is combined with the above highly gendered attitude towards narcissism, the protagonists have their social situation totally reversed by their transformation. Not only is their obsession with their bodies acceptable while female, but the fact that their female bodies cannot fail to successfully embody femininity transforms this obsession from constant fretting over their potential failure to perform into a confidence-boosting affirmation of their success. Basking in this unanimously positive attention, they transform from characters who are social outcasts to characters who are actively lusted after.

## ‘Women generally have more erotic capital than men’: Female Beauty as Capital

A similar example of femininity being represented as a kind of “power” occurs in the narrative *BFF: Best Friends Forever* (TG Tony, 2010), although its treatment of the rituals associated with femininity is antithetical to the way femininity is portrayed in *Narcissus Twin* and *Temazcal*. Rather than femininity being represented as a naturally occurring aspect of female bodies, as it does in the above narratives, *BFF: Best Friends Forever* dedicates a substantial portion of its length to depicting its protagonist learning how to correctly embody femininity, from clothing to cosmetics to body language. While the final feminine performance is, as with *Temazcal* and *Narcissus Twin*, depicted as an unnaturally flawless example of Bartky’s ‘perfect feminine beauty’, it is noteworthy firstly that *BFF: Best Friends Forever* acknowledges that femininity is a performance at all, and secondly that, despite this acceptance that women must learn a series of unnatural behaviours in order to be accepted as feminine, it nevertheless still represents femininity as a unique advantage that women have over men.

Through this mastery of femininity, Tony, the protagonist of *BFF: Best Friends Forever*, is able to turn his life around, going from a lonely single man struggling with long-term unemployment to a successful white-collar career woman with an active social life and a rich boyfriend. Tony gains no skills or qualifications during the narrative that do not directly relate to performing femininity, yet this this is still depicted as enough of an asset to allow him to change the trajectory of his life. Based on this reading, the ideology being articulated by *BFF: Best Friends Forever* - that femininity is a learned behaviour that it is possible to perfect given significant time and practice, and that femininity is, first and

foremost, an asset that women can use to further their goals – is not unlike that of Catherine Hakim’s theory of “erotic capital”, which she first outlined in a *European Sociological Review* (2010), before developing it into a book, *Honey Money* (2012). The remainder of this chapter will examine *BFF: Best Friends Forever* with reference to both Hakim’s theory and the responses of her critics, in particular Sheila Jeffreys. Before beginning the analysis, there will be a brief overview of *BFF: Best Friends Forever*’s story and presentation style, given the complexity introduced by the comic’s substantial length, dialogue-free presentation style, and inclusion of anthropomorphic animal characters.

*BFF: Best Friends Forever* is a sequence of 754 separate images that tells the story of Tony, a humanoid turtle creature living in a world of humans, who is coming to terms with having recently lost his job. The images are wordless collages that combine TG Tony’s own vector-based artwork with 2D artwork, 3D models and photographs sourced from elsewhere. While there is no dialogue, characters are shown to verbally communicate concepts to each other using traditional comic book word balloons containing images representing that concept; for example, a character will communicate the concept of money by “speaking” a word balloon with an image of a wad of cash in it. The characters’ names, “Tony”, “Annie” and “Javier”, are listed on the author’s online gallery (<http://tgtony.deviantart.com/>), but are never identified as such in the sequence itself.

The story of *BFF: Best Friends Forever* begins with its protagonist, Tony – an anthropomorphic turtle in a world of humans – having recently lost his job for unexplained reasons. After being thrown out of his apartment, Tony moves in with a woman, Annie, who takes pity on him. Tony, however, continues to be turned down in job interviews, causing



him to become increasingly depressed and slovenly. Frustrated with Tony's situation, Annie contacts a company called Nu-Life, who kidnap Tony and transform him into a woman called Toni. After Toni returns home, Annie explains that, as an attractive woman, potential employers will react in a more favourable way towards them, and tutors Toni in how to shop for clothing, apply makeup, and walk in high heels. Toni is then immediately hired for the next position they apply for (something reminiscent of "reverse discrimination" narratives discussed later in this chapter with reference to "ladies' night"). At their new job, Toni quickly learns to use femininity to their advantage, wearing increasingly sexualised clothing and openly flirting with men in higher positions, going so far as to enter their boss' office and begin physically stimulating his genitals, for which Toni receives a promotion and a raise. Toni also begins a romance with a male turtle person, Javier, who Toni begins taking advantage of in order to receive gifts and money, but eventually falls in love with. This leads to a happy ending where Toni has the best friend, romantic relationship and successful job that Tony lacked. This reproduces many of the themes in Hakim's work and, while not the only example of "TG" media mirroring Hakim, is the clearest and most direct one in the project's corpus.

Hakim defines erotic capital as 'a fourth personal asset, an important addition to economic, cultural, and social capital' (Hakim, 2010, p. 499) which is 'increasingly important in the sexualized culture of affluent modern societies' (ibid). Erotic capital is 'a combination of aesthetic, visual, physical, social and sexual attractiveness to other members of your society, and especially to members of the opposite sex, in all social contexts' (p. 501). Because 'Women generally have more erotic capital than men' (p. 499), women are therefore in a better position than men to utilise erotic capital, which is not only applicable

to 'mating and marriage markets' (ibid) but also, among others, 'labour markets' (ibid) and 'social mobility' (ibid). Notably, this mirrors the claims made by Warren Farrell in the literature review about women's "beauty power". According to Hakim, 'Today, girls and women understand that brains and beauty are equally effective assets in the path to success' (p. 507) and that erotic capital is able to 'colour relationships in the workplace – negatively in the case of sexual harassment, or positively in the case of casual flirting' (ibid). Given that *BFF: Best Friends Forever* is concerned with Tony's journey from a single, unemployed man to successful, partnered career woman, and that he does so by transforming from male to female and then behaving in increasingly sexualised ways, this mirrors Hakim's claims that women possess greater erotic capital than men, and that erotic capital is a useful resource within labour markets. *BFF: Best Friends Forever* does not depict Tony as being able to get out of unemployment by simply transforming from male to female, but rather that his transformation from male to female allows him to better take advantage of the traits Hakim identifies as central to erotic capital, and it is these traits – framed by the narrative as inherent to womanhood - that allow him to escape unemployment and become a success in his new job.

While Hakim's article covers other possible applications of erotic capital, discussion of *BFF: Best Friends Forever* will deal primarily with her discussion of its use in the labour market, as the narrative hinges on Tony's job success. Hakim's article draws heavily on an economics study by Hamermesh and Biddle (1994) which found that 'plain people earn less than average-looking people, who earn less than good-looking men and women' (Hakim, 2010, p. 509) and that this was 'not explained by differences in intelligence, social class, or self-confidence' (ibid), meaning that there is a 'beauty premium across the whole

workforce' (ibid). Hakim also cites Harper (2000), who 'found substantial earning supplements for people who are tall and/or attractive' (Hakim, 2010, p. 509), and Judge et al. (2009), who found that 'good looks, intelligence, personality, and confidence all determine income' (Hakim, 2010, p. 509). Hakim's conclusion is that 'Like social capital, erotic capital can be an important hidden factor enhancing success in all jobs' (p. 512) and, in what is most relevant to the project's analysis of *BFF: Best Friends Forever*, that 'Erotic capital has been overlooked [...] because of its special value to women, who work harder on personal presentation' (ibid). It is Hakim's argument that women derive greater benefit from erotic capital because they invest more time in their appearances that best explains part of the ideology being articulated in *BFF: Best Friends Forever*, which will now be discussed in greater depth.

While it is true that Tony is hired for the first job he applies for after his transformation from male to female, this is not simply a case of Tony being hired *because* they are now female. This successful application and interview do not occur instantly following the transformation, but rather after a lengthy series of sequences in which Tony learns from Annie how to successfully perform femininity. Between image 174, when Annie first suggests she and Tony go shopping together, and image 321, when Tony leaves to attend the interview, Annie's relationship changes from that of a supportive friend to that of a mentor with a protégé. Taking Tony into a dress shop, Annie gets Tony to try on a total of twenty-six separate outfits over thirty-one images. Six images are solely dedicated to Tony learning to walk in heels, a further six depict Annie taking Tony to a lingerie shop and teaching them how to pick out the most attractive underwear, and a further eleven show Tony learning to adopt a sufficiently feminine posture while walking. Tony is also shown to

change their diet, trading in beer and junk food for coffee and small slices of pink cheesecake. Once this mentoring process is over, Tony begins to take initiative themselves, shopping for clothing and cosmetics without the guiding influence of Annie. The Tony who was unable to find work and the Toni who begins a successful new career are differentiated not just in their sex, but in terms of their entire presentation and attitude, and these non-physical changes are the result of a long process of training and preparation.

While Hakim's article does present some arguments relying on a gender essentialist standpoint – she argues that men innately have a higher demand for sex, and this is 'common sense' (Hakim, 2010, p. 505) rather than something worthy of analysis – she nevertheless argues that 'masculinity and femininity are skilled performances' (p. 504), something which, within the framework of her erotic capital theory, gives women a distinct advantage over men. While Hakim argues that erotic capital is not an innately gendered resource and is available to both men and women to exploit, she argues that 'women have more of it than men' (p. 501) because 'women have a longer tradition of developing and exploiting [erotic capital]' (p. 499), and that 'female beauty in particular [is] a creation, a work of art, which can be achieved through training' (p. 504). In contrast to Bartky's earlier analysis of the pernicious aspects of the fashion-beauty complex, with its insistence that women treat their bodies as requiring constant maintenance and alteration – 'oil it, pumice it, powder it, shave it, pluck it, depilate it, deodorize it' (Bartky, 1990/2011, p. 40) – in order to escape being judged inferior, Hakim takes a similar premise to different conclusion, presenting rituals of femininity as an opportunity for women to empower themselves by developing their erotic capital. Given that so much of *BFF: Best Friends Forever* is spent depicting Tony partaking in femininity rituals, and that it ultimately leads to increased job

success, the narrative is representing something akin to Hakim's argument: Once Tony becomes female, they are required to work at creating and maintaining femininity, but this is ultimately a boon for them, as the demands of a feminine performance open up many, many potential avenues for Tony to create and develop their erotic capital.

Hakim's theory is criticised harshly by other feminist scholars, notably in the introduction to Sheila Jeffreys in *Beauty and Misogyny: Harmful Cultural Practices of the West* (2005/2015). While the narrative of *BFF: Best Friends Forever* is largely in agreement with Hakim, Jeffreys' critique of Hakim provides a few key missing pieces, as it focuses, unsurprisingly, on the negative aspects of erotic capital. To Jeffreys, Hakim's theory is simply there to justify a pre-existing form of oppression, and to repackage it as something positive. Hakim has merely 'developed a schema to explain why beauty practices and sexualization, rather than being oppressive to women, should be understood as forms of power and profit' (Jeffreys, 2005/2015, p. 12). Jeffreys calls attention to what she considers 'rather obvious flaws' (p. 13) in Hakim's theory, namely the argument that women's sexual attractiveness is an advantage in and of itself, rather than a demand made of women by a patriarchal power structure: 'Considering that women have traditionally [been expected to] engage in beauty practices in order to survive in marriage and in the workplace, it is surprising that [women who engage in these practices] have not gained the economic, social or political upper hand. Beauty practices are the recourse of the powerless, rather than the powerful, and men do not have to employ them' (ibid). It is this final line of Jeffreys' that gets to the anxiety at the heart of *BFF: Best Friends Forever*, which will be the next point of discussion.

The anxiety at the heart of *BFF: Best Friends Forever* occupies a contradictory place between Hakim's arguments and Jeffreys' criticisms of them. While the narrative presented is certainly in line with Hakim's belief that women can invest in, develop and exploit their femininity as a way of gaining an advantage, it also represents, in Jeffreys' words, beauty as the recourse of the powerless – though in this case, the powerless is not women as a class, it is Tony as an individual. Men may not have to employ beauty practices to succeed in the real world, but *BFF: Best Friends Forever* is not representative of the real world, it is a work of fiction representative of specific masculine anxieties surrounding gender roles. Tony is placed in a position of powerlessness through their unemployment and repeated failed job interviews, but does not have the ability to develop their erotic capital to overcome this, and must be transformed from male to female in order to do so. Therefore, *BFF: Best Friends Forever* acknowledges that femininity is an unnatural, learned behaviour that women engage in because they lack material power and must placate men, but is simultaneously envious of women's situation, viewing men without material power as having no such "choice", and thus doomed to perpetual rejection while women are free to develop and benefit from their erotic capital. The transformation enables the protagonist to invert his situation from someone who cannot capitalise on femininity to someone who can, escaping rejection by placating others with his body.

## ACCEPTANCE THROUGH ACCESS TO ASSUMED FEMALE PRIVILEGES

In other Rejected to Desired transformation narratives, there is less focus on men's failure to embody masculinity and more focus on the belief that women simply receive preferential treatment at all times, mirroring the Men's Rights Activist discourse discussed in the literature review. These "TG" media narratives have been grouped together as a category called "Acceptance Through Access To Assumed Female Privileges", as these narratives express anxieties specific to the perception among some men that women simply receive preferential treatment for being women. The introduction to this chapter has already covered Warren Farrell's theories, and will return to them later, so this discussion of male attitudes towards gender discrimination will begin instead with a psychological study conducted by Kobrynowicz & Branscombe (1997). The study first demonstrated the way that men's opinions on discrimination were being shaped by mainstream media, which 'called public attention to the possibility that there might be a new group that is a target of discrimination: White men' (Kobrynowicz & Branscombe, 1997, p. 347), through stories which 'portray White men as no longer privileged after centuries of social dominance, but as subjected to unfair prejudice and the suffering that follows from that prior privilege' (p. 348), leading to a situation where 'the traditional perpetrators of such discrimination [white men] are now described as eligible to claim victimized status for themselves' (ibid). Kobrynowicz & Branscombe argue that this is not true in a material sense, as 'white men still make more money and own more property than any other social group' (ibid), but that it is something that men *perceive* as being done to them. But what is influencing this perception?

These men, argue Kobrynowicz & Branscrombe, fall back on claims of anti-male discrimination because such claims function as an 'external attribution men attempt to employ to explain why their outcomes do not meet their expectations' (Kobrynowicz & Branscrombe, 1997, p. 348), a pattern common among privileged groups who find themselves losing access to the privilege they feel entitled to; by way of example, Kobrynowicz & Branscrombe cite Schutte (1995)'s study of white South Africans which found that 'Whites in South Africa report that they now [1995] face discrimination as a result of Nelson Mandela's election and affirmative action programs for blacks' (Kobrynowicz & Branscrombe, 1997, p. 348). The appeal of this response is that 'external attributions lay the blame for undesirable events outside of one's self' (p. 350), leading to the conclusion that 'men with low self-esteem make attributions to discrimination [...] as a means of self-protection [...] these men may feel threatened by their perceptions of limited opportunity and may blame their predicament on external forces' (p. 357). These attitudes are also discussed in Kimmel's *Angry White Men* (2013), discussed in Chapter 3, and are the focus of Justin Gest's *The New Minority* (2016), which links the increasing popularity of far right parties in the US and UK to white heterosexual men's belief that they are now an oppressed minority.

This helps explain the various contemporary writers, not only Farrell, who make claims of anti-male discrimination being not just a serious issue, but one that society is ignoring in favour of focusing on discrimination against women. David Benatar, for example, argues in his recent book *The Second Sexism* (2012) that 'while the [...] manifestation of sexism [against females] is widely acknowledged, few people recognize or take seriously the fact that males are the primary victims of many and quite serious forms of sex



discrimination' (Benatar, 2012, p. x), while Paul Nathanson and Katherine Young's *Spreading Misandry* (2001) argues that men are the victims of 'a conspiracy theory of history' (Nathanson & Young, 2001, p. 108) which promulgates the idea that 'men are collectively or vicariously responsible for most or all of human suffering' (ibid), with society focusing all its time and energy on the plight of women. Anthony Synott's *Re-Thinking Men* (2009) argues that 'the old male sexism' (Synott, 2009, p. 4) has been 'effectively challenged' (ibid) by feminism, but this challenge went too far and 'capsize[d] [...] the old values system: from male-affirmative to female-affirmative' (ibid). There are two things consistent to these accounts of the roots of perceived anti-male discrimination. Firstly, there is the acknowledgement that the subordination of women is a real problem that needs to be addressed and rectified, and that this subordination occurred at the hands of men. Secondly, however, is the argument that this subordination has its roots in the *past* rather than the present, and that contemporary men, in being held responsible for it, are innocent victims, unfairly tasked with providing reparations for injustices they were not responsible for and do not personally benefit from. Furthermore, the beneficiaries of this situation are contemporary women who, if one accepts the premise that women's subordination has been 'widely acknowledged' and 'effectively challenged', are being compensated for oppression they do not personally experience, and thus simply receive preferential treatment with no downside; these are the "assumed female privileges" referred to in this chapter's title.

This chapter will begin by discussing the portrayal of these "female privileges" " in the comic *Rave New World*, and analyse it with reference to the ways in which antifeminist backlash politics has seized on "ladies' night" as evidence that women officially occupy a

privileged position in society that is oppressive to men, and that this is analogous to racial segregation. This will then lead into a subsequent section discussing a more general perception found in these narratives that, even in situations where they do not *officially* occupy a privileged position, women can still “bend the rules” in their favour, and end with a discussion of the portrayal of men as victims of negative male stereotypes and women as the beneficiaries of positive ones.

### ‘NO GUYS ALLOWED’: Ladies’ Night as Anti-Male Segregation

The dialogue-free comic *Rave New World* (Smooch, 2009) sets up the dilemma for its nameless protagonist on the first page: The protagonist, a young man ready for a night on the town, sees a crowd of attractive women chatting with each other in the line for a night club called “Club Sin”. When he attempts to enter, however, he is rejected by the club’s male bouncer, who directs him to a sign reading ‘LADIE’S [*sic*] NIGHT NO GUYS ALLOWED’ (Smooch, 2009, p. 1). Visibly angry that he is barred from entering and enjoying himself, the protagonist storms off, ducks into an alleyway and transforms themselves into a woman. Walking back around the corner to Club Sin, the same bouncer not only lets the protagonist in, but lets them cut to the front of the line, skipping ahead of the same women who would otherwise have gotten exclusive access to the club. With the protagonist having been granted access to the club, the comic ends. Despite its brevity and lack of dialogue, *Rave New World* is revealing in its paradigmatic portrayal of ladies’ night, which it exaggerates into a publicly acceptable form of female-on-male oppression, echoing real-world rhetoric from antifeminist reactionaries.

What a ladies' night specifically entails differs from establishment to establishment, but broadly it indicates that, on a designated ladies' night, the establishment will offer its female patrons 'free or reduced admission' (Kilgannon, 2011), 'lower fees or shorter waits' (Pescatore, 2007), or 'reduced prices on concessions' (Paulson, 1990). This practice has become a locus of anger for antifeminist men, some of whom have taken establishments to court over their ladies' night practices, claiming they are an unconstitutional attack on men's civil rights. From the perspective of legal analysis, Rank (2005) found that 'Generally, male plaintiffs challenging ladies' night argue that by charging men more, an establishment is expressing that men are less welcome and [...] treating men like second class citizens' (Rank, 2006, p. 242). It is this feeling among men that they are being actively discriminated against and made to feel unwelcome that is being expressed by the narrative of *Rave New World*. This analysis will begin by first looking at these legal cases, specifically the ways in which the men involved argue that ladies' night is evidence of anti-male oppression that infringes on men's civil rights. Ladies' Night has been a particular focus of lawyer Roy Dean Hollander, who filed a class action suit against a series of Manhattan nightclubs in 2007 (Kilgannon, 2011), claiming that ladies' night is proof that 'feminists have taken control over every institution in the country' (Pescatore, 2007). His suit was dismissed without hearing. As Rank (2006) notes, Hollander's was not the first attempt at legal action by men against ladies' night. A 1998 case by a New Jersey man claimed that ladies' night was a violation of his civil rights, and a 1979 case attempted to draw a comparison between the plaintiff paying full price with 'a 1921 case in which an African-American man had been denied access to his seat in a theater' (Rank, 2006, p. 234).

Though the cases Rank analyses are not identical, what they have in common is the plaintiff's belief that ladies' night is a form of preferential treatment designed to create sex segregation for the benefit of women: Hollander claims feminism and anti-male institutional power are to blame. This argument, however, runs counter to what is widely accepted by both the establishments and their patrons as the purpose of ladies' night, which is to incentivise female patrons to attend, with the higher than normal number of women present in turn incentivising higher than normal numbers of male patrons to attend: 'Unlike those Jim Crow policies, which sought to exclude or humiliate blacks, Ladies Night incentives are meant to be a boon to men, by bringing more women into a social setting' (Wickham, 2004); 'Bars use discounts to entice women to gather at their businesses, which in turn is used to encourage male patronage' (Paulson, 1991, p. 522); '[Bars are] using these deals to get drunken women into bars to lure men into bars to attempt to pick them up' (Friess, 2007). In spite of there being a commonly accepted reasoning behind the existence of ladies' night, and that courts consistently rule that the difference in price offered to women is too trivial to constitute damages, there is also a reactionary ideology that continues to perceive it as a form of anti-male oppression and sexual segregation, fed by subjective feelings of exclusion and persecution like those demonstrated by the plaintiffs rather than provable forms of material harm.

It is this view of the world, in which men are likened to segregated pre-civil rights African-Americans and women's interests are seen to dominate institutional power (as with Hollander), that is being articulated in the narrative of *Rave New World*. These male feelings of persecution are taken and rendered as literal, presenting a situation in which its male protagonist is struggling against the kind of world presented in the rhetoric of MacLean,

Hollander and the other plaintiffs in the cases Rank analyses. In *Rave New World*, Club Sin's ladies' night is a night on which men are literally barred from entering the establishment, with no justification given, leading to its protagonist being turned away at the door for being male while a crowd of women are free to enjoy themselves. The protagonist's subsequent transformation is therefore not reflective of any personal desire to physically become female, but is simply a way for him to get around Club Sin's enforced sex segregation, with the protagonist's physical transformation and adoption of feminine dress a means to this end. Presented as the victim of legalised anti-male prejudice, the transformation allows the protagonist to change their social situation from an oppressed class to a privileged one.

'This time we're the ones who can act like total bitches': Male Servitude to Women

The comics discussed in this section have been grouped together because they represent women as having the "power" to make men go out of their way to give them preferential treatment. In *Infinite Stories 2* (Infinity Sign, 2013a), this takes a form not unlike that of *Rave New World*, in which two men gain access to an exclusive club by transforming into women, although unlike *Rave New World*, this is simply the manager bending the rules rather than a form of legal sex segregation. This chapter also includes four examples from the ongoing comic serial *The Watch* (Onymous & Ericson, 2002a), in which male characters are faced with large groups of men whom they have no authority over, then transform into women, causing the group of men to subsequently fall over themselves in order to impress and placate the new woman with little to no regard for their own needs. The analysis will begin by offering a brief summary of each of the five stories and a brief explanation of how each one represents female sexuality as a kind of bribery. Once this is complete, there will

be a more in-depth analysis of how the five stories connect with the theme of this section.

The first comic discussed will be *Infinite Stories 2*.

Rather than having a single, linear narrative, *Infinite Stories 2* takes the form of four overlapping narratives, one of which is about two young men, Mack and Kyle, who are, like the protagonist of *Rave New World*, turned away from a club by the bouncer. Unlike *Rave New World*, this is not depicted as an anti-male policy on behalf of the club, but as a result of the club being at capacity. The bouncer apologises, but says that he could bend the rules and admit Mack and Kyle if they 'come back with some girls' (Infinity Sign, 2013a, p. 117). Kyle explains that he knows of 'a place nearby that can help get us in' (p. 118), and leads Mack to a strange shop. There a woman called Maya gives them two 'second skins' (p. 124); hollow "suits" in the shape of a female body, which Kyle comments 'looks like a blow-up doll' (p. 123). By putting the skins on over their bodies, they will transform into the women the suits are modelled after, which will allow them to get into the club. Maya assures them they can 'simply take it off' (p. 124) when they get inside, although she cautions them that wearing the suits too long may make them behave in a 'more feminine' (p. 134) way and 'affect them mentally' (p. 141). Convincingly disguised as women using the skinsuits, Mack and Kyle head back to the club, where they flatter the bouncer by calling him 'big boy' (p. 143) and promising to 'pay [him] back later' (ibid), and are let in. Once inside, Kyle is amazed at 'how easy that was' (p. 145) and suggests he and Mack stay in the suits because 'We've gotten so much attention as women that we don't even have to pay for our drinks' (p. 146) and 'This time we're the ones who can act like total bitches and be treated like royalty' (p. 149). Realising they are far more popular and powerful as women, the pair decide never to take the suits off.

*Infinite Stories 2*'s depiction of men transforming into women in order to be allowed into a club is distinct from the depiction featured in *Rave New World*, although both represent the same broad theme of women being treated preferentially to men. In *Rave New World*, Club Sin is officially designated as off-limits to anyone male, and no reason is given beyond that it is ladies' night. The above analysis of *Rave New World* argued that it was articulating anxiety around women being granted special legal privileges which, taken to extremes, would allow women to force men into a subordinate position through officially recognised sexual segregation. This is not, however, what is depicted in *Infinite Stories 2*. Rather, *Infinite Stories 2* represents women as able to have the rules bent in their favour by using their sexuality, in a manner that recalls the arguments made by Warren Farrell in *The Myth of Male Power* and Hakim's in *Erotic Capital*, both discussed previously. Mack and Kyle's female bodies' ability to get into the club by flirting with the bouncer and promising him sex in return is entirely in keeping with Farrell's arguments about 'sexual bribery' (Farrell, 1993/1994, p. 302), where women's 'come-hither looks are the equivalent of flashing hundred-dollar bills' (ibid), as well as Hakim's argument that beauty is a form of capital.

This chapter will now look at four examples from the ongoing serial *The Watch* (Onymous & Ericson, 2002a), two of which involve the character of Jason, a teenage student of Tandy Gardens high school (the "TG" abbreviation is intentional), and the other two of which involve the character of Professor Madison, a Tandy Gardens teacher. All four examples are presented as self-contained jokes that are not the focus of the stories they appear in. However, as these examples do demonstrate a male character who inverts his

social situation by transforming into a female one, these examples are worth discussing despite their brevity, as cultural messages do not need to be dominant aspects of the narrative in order to demonstrate assumptions. The first two examples occur during the story *Date Night... Of Doom!* (Onymous & Ericson, 2005a), and concern the regular character of Jason. Jason is a male character who often finds himself transformed into his female alter ego, known as Sonja (an anagram of "Jason"), but the depiction of these transformations differ from the previous examples brought up in this chapter in that they are, for the most part, voluntary. Jason is depicted as enjoying being female, if only on a temporary basis, and requests that his friend, Anne, use her magic powers to transform him to and from female form. The analysis of Jason's transformation in *Date Night... Of Doom!* will argue that this is because *The Watch* represents female bodies as a way of getting preferential treatment from men, not because Jason is questioning his gender identity; something consistent with "TG" media's lack of interest in trans\* characters, as discussed in Chapter 5.

The impetus behind Jason's desire to transform from male to female is established early in "Date Night... Of Doom!", when Jason is excited to see a movie, but cannot find anyone to go with, and does not want to go alone. After numerous rejections, when Jason's 'day can't get any cruddier' (Onymous & Ericson, 2005a, p. 4), Jason remembers that a boy named Larry is lovesick for Sonja, who he assumes is Jason's sister. Jason has himself transformed into Sonja and makes a date with Larry, before heading to the mall to pick out a dress. While at the mall, Jason meets their friend Robin, who is annoyed that the line at the mall's smoothie stand is too long and he has to wait. 'Hey, watch this' (Onymous & Ericson 2005a, p. 11) announces Jason, and moves over to the line, which contains only men. Arching his back and thrusting their breasts and buttocks out, Jason moans 'Oh my, I



really want a smoothie, but the line is sooo looong....' (ibid), causing the men in the line to immediately begin competing with each other over who will give up their spot for Jason. Both these scenarios will now be discussed with reference to how Jason is treated while male and while female.

Both these scenarios, Jason making a date with Larry and Jason skipping the smoothie line, depict Jason's female body as the subject of preferential treatment from men, which his male body does not receive. While he is male, nobody is interested in going to the movies with Jason, for reasons ranging from babysitting (p. 3) to thinking the movie will not be as good as the book (ibid) to 'I only like anime' (p. 4). As Sonja, however, Jason finds that Larry is not only willing to go this specific movie with him, but is willing to do anything that will get him closer to Sonja, even in spite of Jason going out of his way to express his clear lack of personal and romantic interest. While in line at the cinema with Larry, Jason shows no affection for him, and is quick to set a series of boundaries which prevent any kind of physical or emotional connection: 'Your hand will stay away from mine at all times. Likewise, your feet away from my feet [...] You will not attempt any [intimate] moves during the movie. You will not talk [...] any attempts at kissing will be dealt with swiftly and severely. Is that clear?' (p. 22). When Larry asks what he *is* allowed to do, Jason replies 'Pay for the tickets and snacks' (ibid). Infatuated with Sonja, Larry is depicted as happily going along with this. Jason's rejection by his friends does not stem from any personal animosity they have with him, or are connected to any failure he has to embody masculinity; they are legitimately too busy or disinterested, and *The Watch* does not depict these refusals as an attack on Jason's character. However, what Jason's transformation into Sonja does is create a situation where he is *actively* lusted after by Larry, who does not care

what Sonja is doing or what demands she makes of him as long as he can be there with her. Jason's ability to cut ahead in the smoothie line while in the form of Sonja follows the same pattern. It is not that the line is holding Jason back due to perceived personal failures, it is simply a line of men observing the rules of the smoothie stand; what the body of Sonja allows Jason to have the rules bent in his favour. While Jason is not treated poorly while male, his treatment while female is nevertheless preferential. The final example from *The Watch* discussed will be that of Professor Madison and his two transformations.

Unlike Jason, Madison does not choose to transform himself, with both his transformations being inflicted randomly by outside forces. Despite coming from two different sources, both transformations result in Madison becoming the same woman, who is young, blonde and wearing a low-cut dress and necklace which draw attention to her extremely large breasts (significantly larger than any other woman's in the comic; something which is repeatedly emphasised). This is in stark contrast to Madison's male self, a middle-aged man who dresses extremely conservatively. Despite the shock of transforming, Madison remains level-headed and is depicted as using their new body's sexuality to exert control over his rowdy male students. Madison is another example of a male character who has little or no social power using his transformed body's sexuality to turn the tables and receive preferential treatment from the men around them.

Madison's first transformation occurs in the story *Angelique the Defective Djinn* (Onymous & Ericson, 2003a), the plot of which revolves around a genie who is required to grant every wish she hears a person make, regardless of their intent. Hidden in a bottle in Madison's classroom, she overhears Madison complain out loud about his students. 'I hate

to say this, but you're my only section of all males, and you're my least attentive group. Honestly, I just wish I could keep your attention!' (Onymous & Ericson, 2003a, p. 10), exclaims Madison in frustration, which causes Angelique to grant his wish, transforming him into the woman described in the above paragraph. After the initial shock wears off, Madison realises his students are staring wide-eyed at their new body, and continues teaching the class, with the students now hyper-focused on their work. At the end of the story, all is reversed, and Madison believes he simply hallucinated the event (p. 20). Madison's second transformation occurs in another 2003 story, *Myths and Legends* (Onymous & Ericson, 2003b), and is extremely brief. In this story, the comic's cast are all transformed into mythical creatures, with Madison becoming a siren version of his female alter ego from *Angelique the Defective Djinn*, who reclines on a rock surrounded by a crowd of male onlookers with hearts in their eyes. Despite Madison telling them to 'go home now... seriously...' (Onymous & Ericson, 2003b, p. 18), they remain enraptured, with a male passer-by announcing 'I think I'm going over there to worship her forever' (ibid). Madison's mermaid form appears again later in the story, with a single panel depicting Madison explaining algebra to their crowd of admirers. 'Professor Madison is the worst of all...', explains the recurring character Katie, 'He's using his powers to... teach!' (p. 38). Although there are no further depictions of Madison transforming in *The Watch*, Madison does dream of becoming his female alter ego again, which also leads to them making male students behave obediently (Onymous & Ericson, 2006b). Madison, like Jason, Mack and Kyle, is depicted as using the attention their female body receives to exert control over the men around them, which *The Watch* explicitly calls 'power'. This perceived "power" will now be discussed with reference to Warren Farrell's analysis of gendered double-standards around female sexuality, as it reveals a standpoint similar to that of the stories previously discussed.

Earlier discussion of *Infinite Stories* cited Farrell's comparison between female flirtation and bribery, and here I wish to expand upon Farrell's conception of female sexuality as a form of social power, 'the world's most potent drug' (Farrell, 1993/1994, p. 85) to which men are 'addicted' (ibid) and reduced to 'biological dependency' (ibid) on. What I find especially relevant to the stories discussed above is Farrell's discussion of the gendered nature of courtship, which Farrell likens to 'the social custom of him taking money out of his pocket, giving it to her, and calling it a date' (p. 314). Historically, argues Farrell, men 'had to be willing to give the fruits of their labor to the beautiful woman's family with no guarantee the beautiful woman would marry them, or that they would get along' (p. 84), and that modernity has only superficially altered this arrangement, as now 'The man buying the woman dinners, drinks, movie tickets and engagement ring' (ibid) to court her is faced with the risk that 'the woman is not required to return [these] if they do not get married' (ibid). Farrell later develops this, along with his previously discussed theory of genetic celebrity, into the argument that men are victims of women's 'greater sexual power' (p. 320); 'if anything is evidence of her power over him, it is his being expected to spend his money to buy her drinks without her reciprocating' (ibid). Collectively, argues Farrell, we must face up to 'our responsibility as a culture for reinforcing men's addiction to female sexual beauty' (p. 311). Finally, as quoted when introducing the Rejected to Desired concept, Farrell considers women exercising their sexuality to manipulate men to be doing so 'free of risk' (p. 300). It is this argument that women do not face any negative treatment as a result of their sexuality which will now be discussed.

What is contradictory about these stories is that they depict situations in which a female body becomes the focus of the attention of the men around it because of its sexuality and nothing else, yet simultaneously do not depict the person whose body has become an object of sexual lust as suffering from sexual objectification. MacKinnon (1989) defines sexual objectification as the state of 'having a social meaning imposed upon your being that defines you as to be sexually used' (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 140); Langton (2009) explains the concept as 'the idea [...] that certain sexual ways of treating someone may be ways of denying their autonomy [...] treating them as readily replaceable [...] treating them as something merely to be used' (Langton, 2009, p. 247). It is not sexual desire, but the reduction of a person to nothing but that which satiates sexual desire. However, Nussbaum (1995) argues that "objectification" is a broad term which encompasses at least seven different meanings, some of them 'always morally problematic' (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 251) but others 'necessary or even wonderful features of sexual life' (ibid), stressing 'the overall context of the relationship' (p. 265); '[W]hat is problematic is not instrumentalization per se, but treating someone as *primarily* or *merely* an instrument' (ibid, emphasis in original).

This complicates understanding the depictions in these "TG" comics, as they depict men reducing women to primarily sexual objects without their consent, something that MacKinnon, Langton and Nussbaum all agree is harmful, and yet these women are also represented as in control of the situation and *wanting* to be objectified, suggesting that it does not harm them. With "TG" media's masculinist standpoint in mind, however, the representation of women as wanting to be objectified has troubling implications. Bernard, Loughnam et al.( 2015) provide examples of the extremely harmful effects of sexual objectification, detailing a Canadian rape case in which the victim, a woman in her 20's, was

deemed to be at least partially responsible for the actions of her male rapist through wearing revealing clothing. This case was then used by the researchers as a starting point to test the reactions of people to cases of rape in which the female victim is and is not described in sexually objectifying ways, with the study concluding that 'sexual objectification is [...] likely to encourage [...] more leniency toward perpetrators of sexual abuse' (Bernard, Loughnam et al., 2015, p. 506). This is a more than adequate counter to Farrell's argument that women can use their sexuality to leverage men 'free of risk' (Farrell, 1993/1994, p. 300) – though Farrell himself appears to argue against his own point in the very same chapter, arguing that men who rape a woman they were sexually aroused by deserve leniency as they were 'under the influence' (p. 320).

Read with reference to Farrell, these stories reveal a similar standpoint, or at least similar concerns with reference to perceived gendered double-standards and a dismissal of the potential harms of sexual objectification. *Infinite Stories* and Jason's date with Larry both depict their protagonist using his female body to extort purchases out of men without, as Farrell puts it, 'reciprocating'. Mack and Kyle enjoy being bought drinks and 'treated like royalty' by the men around them despite knowingly acting 'like total bitches', while Jason expects Larry to pay for everything on their date while holding him to a lengthy series of rules that explicitly prevent any form of intimacy. Jason's earlier use of his female body to cut in line at the smoothie stand and the two transformations of Madison, meanwhile, present men as helplessly enthralled by female sexuality, but also subservient to it. While depicted as overcome with sexual lust, these men are nevertheless portrayed as respectful of women's boundaries and motivated by a desire to please them by any means necessary; it is not the harmful sexual objectification described above, but simply a 'power' wielded by

women over men. Even in the case of Larry, who repeatedly phones Sonja after being told repeatedly that she is not interested in him, and Madison's admirers, who surround them and refuse to leave when he asks them, the stories are so convinced that men's intentions are nothing but honourable that they do not acknowledge that this behaviour could be interpreted as harassment. By ignoring the potential harms of being a sexually objectified woman and instead emphasising female sexuality as a form of social power with no downsides, these stories are symptomatic of a standpoint that ignores the reality of women's experiences in favour of men's anxiety over perceived preferential treatment of sexualised women. The transformations in these stories function as a way for their protagonists to experience this perceived power over other men, inverting their social situation from someone of little importance or authority to someone who is the centre of attention and constantly doted on.

#### 'If I wanted shit from a bald baboon I would have brought you a banana': Escaping Negative Male Stereotypes

*The Gallery* (Sturkwurk, 2012a) is a 128 page comic dealing with the prejudicial treatment suffered by an art gallery security guard named Frank, whose thoughts and feelings are dismissed and mocked by those around him on the grounds that his masculine body – large, fit, muscular, hirsute and balding – is not suggestive of an artistic temperament. It depicts Frank as unable to escape these assumptions, which lead to stress, anxiety and self-loathing. He is shown to openly consider that being a woman would make things easier for him, but before taking any serious steps in this direction, he is transformed during his sleep into a glamorous and successful female artist, and eventually rises to take

over the gallery he originally worked at. This remainder of this chapter will argue that *The Gallery* is a story driven by anxiety over what it perceives as negative stereotypes of masculinity; that men are viewed as crude, unsophisticated and less emotional than women, and are met with derision and hostility for attempting to break out of their role. Frank's predicament is also different to that of other "TG" media protagonists discussed so far, as he is not seen as less masculine for attempting to understand art, but rather his masculinity is highlighted and then used to dismiss him.

*The Gallery* begins by making a clear and obvious distinction between Frank, the gallery's security guard, and the gallery's patrons. Frank's love for and appreciation of art is foregrounded, with his boss openly commenting that Frank is 'the only guard I know who takes a day off just to come back here and stare at the artwork' (Sturkwurk, 2012a, p. 11), while Frank describes the paintings as 'really special' (p. 12) and 'personal' (p. 23). This is contrasted with the attitude of the gallery's patrons, who only view the paintings as 'really pretty' (p. 7) accessories that 'would match the new kitchen' (p. 6). When Frank attempts to give his own interpretation of the paintings to a female patron, however, she instantly dismisses him by drawing attention to his physical appearance: 'If I wanted shit from a bald baboon I would have brought you a banana' (p. 15). After returning home, the dejected Frank admits to himself that he agrees with her assessment: 'That woman at the museum was right. I am a hairy baboon. God, I hate my reflection' (p. 37). On the basis of the portrayal of Frank and the gallery's patrons, *The Gallery* depicts Frank's dilemma quite clearly: He is an artistic spirit surrounded by superficial people who judge art according to its price and whether or not it is 'pretty', rather than relating to its deeper meaning, as he



does. However, as a security guard with a large, muscular, hairy body, he is a victim of that same superficiality, dismissed as a 'baboon' because of his appearance.

Interestingly, unlike other "TG" media protagonists discussed so far, Frank's masculinity is not challenged by the people around him. This is, rather, the root of his problem; his body is *so* masculine it is simply assumed that artistic and emotional expression are beyond him. Trapped by this disconnection between how he wishes to express himself and the expectations of his male body, Frank is depicted as suffering psychologically, wracked by nervousness and self-loathing which prevents him from talking to women or socialising, and is regularly seeing a therapist (p. 31). It is also revealed through panel details, though not openly discussed in dialogue, that Frank has come to see himself as trans\* and ordered hormone replacement treatment through the mail (p. 36). While one of the defining features of "TG" media, as discussed in Chapter 5, is that it does not feature LGBT characters, *The Gallery* is a unique case in that Frank being a victim of negative male stereotypes is itself entirely unrelated to the fact he is having doubts about his gender identity; the woman who dismisses Frank as a 'bald baboon' is judging him on an entirely superficial level *because* everything about him suggests an uncomplicated masculinity. This is the source of his rejection, not his personal anxiety over his gender identity. Frank's own interpretation of a painting underlines this, with him rhapsodising that the painting is 'All about freedom [...] [the artist] has escaped some role forced upon her by society' (pp. 22 – 24). On the basis of his portrayal, Frank is constrained not by having failed to embody masculinity, but by the social expectations that come with him having embodied it successfully – whether he wants to or not.

The assumptions made about Frank are consistent with the negative assumptions about men expanded on by the antifeminist authors quoted in the chapter's introduction. Benatar (2012) argues that 'Males are believed to be more aggressive and violent [...] less caring and nurturing' (Benatar 2012, p. 88), while Synott (2009) argues that 'the definition of men has become increasingly negative' (Synott, 2009, p. 1), with men represented as 'stupid and idiots, the butt of jokes [...] half-dead, half-brained [...] dumb, dense pigs' (ibid), 'lazy, loud, obnoxious' (p. 57) and 'jerks, fools, dogs [and] animals' (p. 135). Synott backs his argument with empirical data from Williams & Best (1990), who identified common oppositional beliefs about men and women; in terms of *The Gallery*, what is specifically relevant is 'Women are emotional; men are unemotional. Women are sensitive; men are rude' (Williams and Best, 1990, p. 78). Women are also described as 'dreamy [...] sentimental and soft-hearted' (ibid).

What is flawed in Benatar and Synott's arguments is that these aspects of gender – emotional : unemotional, sensitive : insensitive etc. – are presented as if they are pairings of positive female traits and negative males ones, rather than *relational*. For example, women being seen as "more emotional" than men is not simply a negative stereotype of men, it is an assumption which could also serve as a justification for women's subordination by portraying them as unstable. The standpoint is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the functioning of patriarchy; an antifeminist discourse identified by Dragiewicz (2011). In this antifeminist discourse, "patriarchy" is taken to mean a system in which individual men are assumed to have power over women at all times, then subsequently dismissed on the grounds that each man's experience is unique to him and contains a combination of positive and negative events. This leads to, to use one of Dragiewicz's examples, the denial that

domestic violence has its roots in patriarchy because some women are also perpetrators of violence, and that domestic violence also occurs in same-sex couples (Dragiewicz, 2011, p. 108). Another example of Dragiewicz's, relevant especially to the arguments of Benatar and Synott, is that women's assumed 'delicacy' (p. 109) and need for 'protection' (ibid) were used as a justification for preventing women's involvement in the criminal justice system in order to spare them the 'ugly details of crimes' (ibid), with the end result being a criminal justice system dominated by male interests. Another example would be that given by Hughes (2002), who argues that the assumption that women embody 'compassion' (Hughes, 2002, p. 72) and 'caring' (ibid) traps women in a situation where they are expected to 'take responsibility for others' needs' (ibid), lest they be judged 'not a woman at all' (ibid). The flawed standpoint articulated by Benatar and Synott is also the standpoint of *The Gallery*, which depicts Frank as a victim of negative stereotypes only while male, with them vanishing once they have transformed, as though these stereotypes exist purely to harm men rather than as a relational means of upholding male supremacy. This will be further developed with reference to the work of Carol Gilligan in Chapter 8.

Frank's transformation is caused by a female gallery patron who, unlike the others, does not dismiss Frank, saying that she sees through his exterior into his 'soul' (Sturkwurk, 2012a, p. 38) and commenting that Frank is 'good at projecting [his] thoughts from the female perspective' (p. 26). Before leaving, she offers Frank 'something wondrous I'd like to share with you' (ibid). After a strange dream, Frank awakes the next morning to a television news broadcast announcing that the anonymous artist responsible for Frank's favourite painting has been identified as 'Hollywood A-Lister Melanie Anders' (p. 69), which angers Frank as does not want to believe that the beautiful paintings he treasured were the

product of 'some spoiled actress' (p. 70). Frank then looks in the mirror and realises that, overnight, they have physically become Melanie. The woman from the gallery then appears and explains that Frank is now 'A person of many talents. An actress. A painter. A lover. Frank never existed. You've always been Melanie [...] one of the most respected and highest paid stars in the world' (p. 91 - 94). After a night of sex between Frank - now Melanie - and the woman, the story jumps ahead to one year later, and it is revealed that Melanie is now chair of the gallery's board.

In contrast to Frank's life, Melanie's is one of endless artistic and sexual freedom, with "freedom" being a recurring theme throughout *The Gallery*: Frank describes the paintings as letting him 'feel the freedom' (p. 14), are 'all about freedom' (p. 22), 'the artist is telling us she's free [...] she's escaped some role forced upon her by society' (p. 23). However, the freedom that Melanie is depicted as enjoying is not simply that she has escaped the role that society forced upon Frank, but that success has been handed to her without her having to work for it. Frank awakens as Melanie with a life that is already at its creative zenith, including a successful film career, gallery exhibitions of her artwork and a position as chair of the gallery board. Notably, Frank dismissively describes Melanie as 'spoiled' (p. 70) and is angered that she was the one who produced the paintings which connected with him. Given Frank's struggle with others' perceptions of him and frustration at having his artistic soul ignored, the project argues that Frank's anger is coming from the reactionary masculinist standpoint touched on throughout this chapter; Frank cannot accept that Melanie, an attractive, successful, rich woman, has faced the same obstacles as him, if any obstacles at all, and thus cannot herself be in a position to create art which resonates with his own feelings. With the final revelation that Frank *is* Melanie, however, the

contradiction in Frank's feelings is resolved: Melanie's work expresses the freedom from oppression that Frank longs for not because Melanie herself has experienced oppression and yearns to be free, but because Melanie has experienced Frank's oppression, the only oppression *The Gallery's* standpoint acknowledges. By representing male stereotypes purely as anti-male rather than as part of a relational system that ultimately justifies male supremacy, *The Gallery* is able to have its protagonist "escape" these stereotypes to a world of limitless freedom by transforming from male to female.

## ACCEPTANCE INTO HIERARCHY THROUGH EMPHASISED FEMININITY

This chapter will return to Connell for a theoretical framework, as there is a greater emphasis on the relations between differing forms of masculinities in the “TG” media narratives being discussed. The male cast members of these “TG” media narratives are arranged in a clearly defined hierarchy of masculinities, with hegemonic masculinity at the top and subordinated masculinities below, and the conflict between these masculinities is what drives the events of the story. Ultimately, the characters’ transformation from male to female is not an escape from this hierarchical conflict, but a way for them to re-integrate themselves into the same hierarchy in a different role, embodying what Connell terms “emphasised femininity”, a theoretical concept which will now be outlined.

As Connell (1987) argues, ‘There is no femininity that is hegemonic in the sense that the dominant form of masculinity is hegemonic among men’ (Connell, 1987, p. 183) because, while ‘Hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to women and to subordinated masculinities’ (p. 185-186), ‘All forms of femininity in this society are constructed in the context of the overall subordination of women to men’ (p. 186-187); because femininity is defined in relation to masculinity, this means that the ideals of femininity, while always subject to change in the same way that ideals of masculinity are, will also always be configured around the needs of hegemonic masculinity, and thus cannot by design exert a hegemonic influence of their own. For this reason, argues Connell, it is incorrect to label any form of femininity “hegemonic”, as even the most idealised, sought-

after form of femininity is still 'an adaptation to men's power' (p. 188). In order to recognise that certain ostensible 'womanly virtues' (ibid) receive praise and encouragement, creating a feminine ideal that is privileged above other forms of femininity without being hegemonic, Connell uses "emphasised femininity" to describe this configuration.

Emphasised femininity is 'defined around compliance with [patriarchal] subordination and is oriented to accommodating the interest and desires of men' (p. 183), with patriarchal societies praising and emphasizing female behaviour that complements and supports masculinity without threatening its elevated status. Femininity is thus constructed around a narrow spectrum of passive, supportive behaviours, namely 'compliance, nurturance and empathy' (p. 188). Neil Korobov expands on this in his study of men's relationship with emphasised femininity (2011), noting that men's expectations of feminine behaviour 'cluster[ed] around three broad types of emphasized femininity' (Korobov, 2011, p. 56); 'compliance [...] with respect to men's sexual desires' (ibid), 'emotional caretaking' (ibid) and 'passivity' (ibid). While other forms of femininity exist, structured around 'strategic combinations of compliance, resistance and co-operation' (Connell 1987, p. 184), the omnipresent exaltation of emphasised femininity 'prevents other models of femininity gaining cultural articulation' (p. 188). That these non-compliant femininities lack visibility and acceptance is also echoed in Korobov's study, with the young men interviewed frequently interpreting women's lack of compliance as simply a different way of expressing emphasised femininity; for example, women who were not compliant with a man's sexual desires were interpreted as, rather than simply disinterested in him, consciously playing 'a cat-and-mouse game of enticement' (Korobov, 2011, p. 70) in order to make herself a more attractive conquest. Other women who failed to be compliant were simply written off as

'irrational' (ibid) or a 'crazy bitch' (ibid), as though psychological instability and malice were more plausible explanations for this behaviour than a femininity not configured to placate male desire.

The belief that there is only one configuration of femininity, and that this configuration harmonises with hegemonic masculinity rather than creating a hierarchical relationship, is what is at the core of these texts. The analysis will begin with *Rabbit's Foot* (Sturkwurk & Nimeyal, 2012).

'Those two thugs are going to be happier as girls than I'll ever be as a man': Subordinate Masculinity to Emphasised Femininity

The narrative of the comic *Rabbit's Foot* (Sturkwurk & Nimeyal, 2012) bares many similarities to that of *BFF: Best Friends Forever* – it is about two men trapped in a directionless, impoverished situation who then transform into women, allowing them to escape by using femininity – but is being analysed with reference to emphasised femininity rather than the beauty industry, as the narrative places less emphasis on the female *body* and more on adopting feminine behaviour. The protagonists are not depicted as escaping the hierarchy of masculinities which oppresses them, but rather that they use emphasised femininity to reconfigure their position within that hierarchy so that they form a complementary, though still subordinate, relationship with the man on top of the hierarchy, rather than taking part in an antagonistic power struggle.



The protagonists of *Rabbit's Foot* are two young men called Melvin and Patrick. From the few details *Rabbit's Foot* reveals about them, it is clear that they are not in control of their lives: They rely on Patrick's father's credit card for their living expenses, are unemployed, doing poorly in school and are tormented by the local gang leader, Baxter, and his 'jock buddies' (Sturkwurk & Nimeyal, 2012, p. 8). This is not a simple "jocks vs. nerds" story, however, as Melvin and Patrick are themselves 'thugs' (p. 28) with aspirations of forming their own gang to 'wipe out' (p. 8) Baxter and control the area. Furthermore, Melvin and Patrick have their own subordinate target, a 'little geek' (p. 1) called Ben, whom they are attempting to intimidate into using his computer skills to alter Melvin and Patrick's failing grades. Melvin and Patrick meet a man who claims to be a wizard, and who quickly convinces them of his powers by causing Patrick to temporarily sprout rabbit ears. The wizard offers to 'improve [their] lives' (p. 5) by selling them a magic rabbit's foot which he claims will grant them three wishes. Eager to escape their situation and get the upper hand over Baxter, Melvin and Patrick accept the wizard's offer. Patrick wishes that 'Whenever Baxter sees me, Patrick Munroe, he will be weak in the knees' (p. 8) while Melvin wishes that any men the two of them meet will become 'putty in our hands' (p. 10) and that 'we never have any money problems for life' (ibid). The foot then glows, signifying that their wishes will soon come true.

Melvin then notices that his girlfriend, Jenny, is having lunch with Baxter in a fancy restaurant and attempts to confront her, but he is turned away at the door for lacking 'the proper attire' (p. 12). Furious, Melvin and Patrick then decide to use Patrick's father's credit card to buy new clothes in order to meet the restaurant's dress code, and walk to a clothing store. Upon trying on new clothes in the store, however, Melvin and Patrick transform from

male to female, becoming “Missy” and “Trixi”, two young women who are obsessed with fashion, and buy tens of thousands of dollars’ worth of clothing, which Trixi pays for using a wad of cash they pull from their cleavage. Missy and Trixi then return to the restaurant where Baxter is dining. Rather than being turned away, as Melvin and Patrick were, Missy and Trixi announce that they are ‘here to join Mr Baxter’ (p. 25) and are told that he and Jenny are ‘expecting you’ (p. 25). Missy begins stimulating Baxter’s crotch under the table, while Trixi and Jenny kiss each other, all traces of the conflict between the four now absent. The story concludes with a brief sequence in which Ben, the nerd whom Melvin and Patrick had been bullying, is revealed to have orchestrated the day’s events with the help of the wizard. Ben, though happy that ‘those two will never harass me again’ (p. 28), half-heartedly laments to the wizard that ‘Those two thugs are going to be happier as girls than I’ll ever be as a man’ (ibid). ‘That’s not a problem’ (ibid) replies the wizard, and transforms Ben into a young woman wearing a tighter, more revealing version of his original clothing. ‘This isn’t what I meant’ (ibid), laments the now-female Ben, and the story ends. This analysis will argue that the story of *Rabbit’s Foot* is driven by the tensions underscoring a hierarchy of masculinities embodied by its four central male characters – Melvin, Patrick, Baxter and Ben – and that, by transforming three of them from male to female, this hierarchical tension is resolved.

*Rabbit’s Foot* depicts its four central male characters in an explicitly hierarchical relationship, with each character’s position in this hierarchy determined by the kind of masculinity they embody. At the top of the hierarchy is the ‘asshole jock’ (p. 1) Baxter, a character so powerful that he is able to apply pressure to the other three men throughout the story despite not directly interacting with any of them until page 26 of 29. This pressure

is depicted as being applied in three ways. Firstly, Baxter persecutes Melvin and Patrick using the physical force wielded by his (unseen, but mentioned) gang of 'jock buddies' (p. 8), a force that Melvin and Patrick lack the manpower to resist. Secondly, despite his use of physical force and description as an 'idiot' (p. 11) potentially pigeonholing him as a simple thug, Baxter is also depicted as possessing social and cultural capital which allow him to distance himself from Melvin and Patrick *without* the use of violence; dining at an expensive restaurant, Baxter is so removed from anyone who does not meet the establishment's restrictive dress code that Melvin and Patrick are unable to even get his attention before being turned away by the staff. Thirdly, Baxter is depicted as highly sexually desirable to women, with Melvin's girlfriend, Jenny, dropping Melvin for Baxter without even the courtesy of an explanation. On the basis of these three aspects of Baxter's character – his physical power, his possession of cultural capital, and his sexual attractiveness - he far more successfully embodies the hegemonically masculine ideal than Melvin, Patrick or Ben, placing him at the top of the hierarchy of masculinities in *Rabbit's Foot*.

Beneath Baxter on the hierarchy are Melvin, Patrick and Ben, who are not only kept in subordinate positions by Baxter, but also fight among themselves to establish dominance over each other. Melvin and Patrick consistently 'harass' (p. 28) Ben and dismissively refer to him as a 'little geek' (p. 1), yet also admit dependence on him, believing he can hack into their school's computer and 'fix' (p. 1) their failing grades, and that winning him over to their side would allow them to 'wipe out Baxter' (p. 8). Melvin and Patrick's own relationship is also hierarchical, with Patrick declaring himself 'the one in charge' (p. 8) and threatening to 'beat the shit out of' (p. 10) Melvin when Melvin acts without Patrick's approval. Patrick is also depicted as coming from a similarly privileged upbringing to that of

Baxter, casually using his father's credit card as a source of financial support and gaining leverage over the clothing store clerk by mentioning that he is the son of 'Mr Munroe' (p. 14) and that refusing him will result in 'a lot of trouble' (ibid). It is noteworthy, however, that it is Melvin who is shown to have a girlfriend while Patrick is single; while there is no explicit explanation of why, a feasible interpretation is that Patrick's far more intense, violent and domineering personality makes him a less attractive romantic partner than the laid-back Melvin. Ben is depicted as smarter and more capable than either Melvin or Patrick, with the pair desperate for Ben's help in dealing with both their failing grades and their ongoing war with Baxter, and it is eventually revealed that Ben masterminded the events of the story in order to free himself from Melvin and Patrick's persistent bullying.

In the characters of Melvin, Patrick and Ben, *Rabbit's Foot* represents three examples of subordinated masculinities which are unable to properly achieve ascendancy when weighed against hegemonic masculinity: Melvin has some success with women, but is a pushover and easily shoved around by Patrick; Patrick is violent, domineering and from a privileged background, but is not intelligent or gracious enough for this to translate into social power, and Ben demonstrates intelligence and aptitude, but lacks physical strength. This creates a series of fractious power relationships between these men, with Patrick attempting to dominate Melvin, Melvin and Patrick aiming to both dominate Ben, Ben searching for a way to overcome Melvin and Patrick through non-violent means, and the three of them existing in the shadow of the hegemonically masculine Baxter. This has resulted in the characters being trapped in a perpetually antagonistic relationship with masculinity, in which they are unwilling to accept occupying a subordinate position, but also lack the means necessary to escape from that position. This analysis will now discuss how

the characters' transformations resolve this antagonism by reconfiguring their positions from antagonistic to complementary.

Because the antagonism within *Rabbit's Foot* is driven by a conflict between masculinities attempting to achieve dominance over each other, the transformations undergone by Melvin, Patrick and Ben serve the function of resolving this conflict by transforming the characters from male to female, removing their need to embody masculinity and to compete with other men. I also argue, however, that Melvin and Patrick are not actually liberated from the hierarchy by their transformation, but instead reintegrated into it playing a different role; that of emphasised femininity as identified by Connell. Despite Patrick's wish to make men 'weak in the knees' (p. 8) and Melvin wish that men become 'putty in our hands' (p. 10), Missy and Trixi are still depicted as defined by how Baxter relates to them, while Baxter himself has lost none of his power. Missy and Trixi are, immediately after their transformation, depicted as obsessed with appearing as feminine and sexualised as possible, constantly commenting on each other's bodies and spending over three thousand dollars on 'clothing, makeup and accessories' (p. 23) in a single transaction. Trixi's relationship with Baxter is overtly sexual, with Baxter's first words to her being 'You look fantastic' (p. 26), followed by Trixi stimulating Baxter's crotch under the table and suggestively mentioning having 'something of yours for dessert' (p. 27). Missy's relationship with Baxter is less clear, as she is depicted as being in a sexual relationship with Jenny, but still asks Jenny 'Has Baxi behaved himself, or should I be jealous?' (p. 26) when they first meet. Despite the ambiguity around the precise nature of Missy and Jenny's sex lives, the interaction depicted between Missy, Trixi, Jenny and Baxter demonstrates that Missy and Trixi both complement Baxter by embodying emphasised femininity that supports

his own hegemonic masculinity. Both women are represented as compliant with male sexual desire, with Trixi openly discussing sex with Baxter and initiating foreplay under the table, and Missy, despite being in a sexual relationship with another woman, treating the possibility that her partner has had sex with “Baxi” as a cute conversation starter. They are also, as previously discussed, both fixated on appearing as sexually attractive as possible. Both women are also depicted referring to men using pet names, with Max becoming ‘Maxy Waxy’ (p. 23) and Baxter becoming ‘Baxi’ (p. 26) and ‘Bax’ (p. 27), demonstrating their affection. On the basis of this characterisation, Missy and Trixie both embody traits consistent with emphasised femininity as defined by both Connell and Koborov; they are sexually compliant with heterosexual male desire, as well as being passive and emotionally supportive.

*Rabbit’s Foot* is a story that acknowledges the existence of a hierarchical social structure that privileges men who embody a certain form of masculinity. It also recognises that this hierarchy is innately unjust, with the man at the top of the pecking order being depicted in a highly unflattering light, and the smartest, most well-adjusted male character being victimised by other men. More tellingly, it also accepts that some men simply *cannot* embody hegemonic masculinity due to their physical limitations, aptitudes and social circumstances, and that any attempt at doing so will ultimately end in failure. These men can choose to accept their lot in life, and with it the knowledge that they occupy a subordinate position, or can struggle in vain against it, only to find themselves put back in their place by physical and systemic violence. It is this anxiety that *Rabbit’s Foot* is articulating; it expresses that the hierarchy of masculinities is a source of conflict, anger and unhappiness, but also cannot conceive of an alternative, even given the presence of a

wizard with the power to warp reality. By transforming its characters from male to female, it is able to give them what it explicitly refers to as a happy ending while also keeping the gender hierarchy intact. As women, the characters remain part of the same hierarchy that oppressed them as men, but by embodying an emphasised femininity that is configured around the local embodiment of hegemonic masculinity, they are able to occupy a subordinate position that is complementary rather than antagonistic.

### 'Do the right thing and be a man!' Love Triangle to Sexual Fantasy

Another example of a tension between competing masculinities being resolved by transforming one of the men into a woman occurs in the comic *Sunday in the Park with Peri* (Milagro & Chiara, 2009). The first character to be discussed is Andrew, the protagonist, who is subordinate to his friend, Jeff. Both men are depicted in contrasting ways: Jeff is slim, confident, well-groomed and has a long-term girlfriend, Trisha, while Andrew is fat, slouched, bespectacled, unkempt and spends his life 'holed up in his mother's house' (Milagro & Chiara, 2009, p. 2) playing video games. Andrew is also far more passive than Jeff, only venturing outside his mother's house because Jeff, concerned about his friend's anti-social behaviour, asked him out for the afternoon. Andrew is also depicted as scared of breaking rules, panicking when Jeff suggests they ignore a warning sign and walk down a closed-off path, which prompts Jeff to respond 'Is that what you want? Wanna run home to your mommy again? Do the right thing and be a man!' (p. 10). Andrew's passivity also prevents him from revealing his true feelings about Trisha, whom he lusts after. She is aware of this, admitting to Jeff that she is nervous about 'the way [Andrew] looks at me' (p. 4), but

Jeff ignores her concerns in favour of attempting to convince her to partake in a *menage a trois* with himself and another woman.

The depiction of Andrew matches the archetypal subordinated man as identified by Connell and Pascoe. As quoted in this chapter's introduction, Pascoe argues that a man will be rejected by masculinity if he is seen 'failing at the masculine tasks of competence, heterosexual prowess, and strength, or in any way revealing weakness or femininity' (Pascoe, 2007, p.54), and Andrew quite clearly has; he is dependent on his mother, timid, physically unimpressive and sexually frustrated. For this, he is symbolically treated as feminine by Jeff, who tells Andrew that he has failed to 'be a man'. Jeff, meanwhile, is physically fit, happy to take risks, orders Andrew around and is so confident sexually that he believes he can coax Trisha into performing a sexual fantasy she is morally opposed to. On the basis of the contrast between the two men, *Sunday in the Park with Peri* represents a hierarchical relationship between a failed masculinity in the form of Andrew and a successful masculinity in the form of Jeff. However, Andrew is able to reconfigure his relationship with Jeff and Trisha through transforming from male to female.

When the trio accidentally wake up a fairy (the Peri of the title) who offers to grant each of them a wish, Andrew wishes that Trisha was his girlfriend, Trisha wishes that Jeff would propose to her, and Jeff wishes Trisha were more open to his sexual fantasies. As Trisha cannot simultaneously be Andrew's girlfriend *and* be in a committed marital relationship with Jeff, the fairy resolves the contradiction by transforming Andrew into a woman whom Trisha, now altered to be sexually uninhibited and fine with open relationships, is attracted to. Andrew is initially horrified at the changes to their body,



pleading 'This isn't what I wished for! Change me back!' (Milagro & Chiara, 2009, pp. 25-26), but when Trisha kisses them passionately, Andrew realises their wish has been granted, and willingly adopts a new female identity, "Shayla". Jeff, Trisha and Shayla then leave the park, arm in arm, ready to take part in Jeff's three-way sexual fantasy. Here, much like *Rabbit's Foot*, the transformations undergone by the cast allow for the tension between the characters to be resolved in what is presented as happy ending. However, again like *Rabbit's Foot*, the tension is resolved simply by making the characters better integrate into the gendered structure that caused the tension to begin with, physically and mentally altering them so that they can more successfully play the rigid and restrictive roles of either hegemonic masculinity or emphasised femininity. Andrew is not masculine enough to woo Trisha away from Jeff, and even if he were, this would not resolve the tension, as Jeff would now be in a subordinate position to Andrew, reversing the power dynamic between the two rather than solving the problem itself. Post-transformation, Trisha and Shayla readily adopt emphasised femininity, both immediately compliant with Jeff's sexual fantasy, and making no similar demands of Jeff. Because femininity is configured around satisfying male desire, Andrew, as Shayla, is able to pursue a romantic and sexual relationship with Trisha, despite her being Jeff's fiancé, because Jeff interprets another woman having sex with his fiancé as a form of male-centric titillation rather than a threat to his masculine dominance, which another *man* having sex with his fiancé certainly would be. In this new configuration, the successfully masculine Jeff remains at the top of the hierarchy and loses nothing, while the female Trisha and subordinate male Andrew resolve their tensions with Jeff and with each other by adopting emphasised femininity. As with *Rabbit's Foot*, *Sunday in the Park with Peri* articulates anxiety around masculine hierarchy, with Andrew trapped in a subordinate position that he lacks the means to escape. Furthermore, despite the man he is subordinate

to being depicted as a close friend who does genuinely care for him, Andrew's failed masculinity still causes eruptions of anger and frustration between the pair, as if Andrew simply has no means to escape being judged aside from locking himself in his mother's house all day. Yet, again like *Rabbit's Foot*, *Sunday in the Park with Peri* fails to conceive of an alternative, non-hierarchical relationship between masculinities, or between masculinities and femininities, and so it presents a "happy ending" where the characters simply become more adept at conforming to the gender roles they previously failed to successfully embody.

#### 'You gave me a new life. A better life': Resolving Conflict Between Masculinities

This section will discuss both the stand-alone comic *Last Penalty* (Infinity Sign & Nate, n.d.) and a recurring character across multiple issues of *The Watch*. In both instances, the transformed character begins as a man at the top of a competing hierarchy of masculinities, leading to his relationship with other men being antagonistic as they struggle for dominance. However, after transforming into a woman, the character is no longer part of this struggle, and is able to reconfigure their relationship into a non-hostile one. This is similar to the struggle between masculinities discussed previously with reference to *Rabbit's Foot*, though in these cases the transformed characters begin in the dominant, rather than subordinate, position, and their transformation allows them to "step down" from their dominant position by embodying a successful femininity rather than an unsuccessful masculinity. In *Last Penalty*, the transformed character is a violent criminal, currently incarcerated, who struggles with a group of equally violent prison guards, while in *The*

*Watch*, the character is a school bully who upholds the school's gender binary by bullying gender non-conforming students.

*Last Penalty* (Infinity Sign & Nate, n.d.), a comic which contains a combination of static and animated panels, features a more ambivalent relationship between masculinities in which no one man can be said to categorically dominate the others. Set largely in a maximum security prison, *Last Penalty* hinges on the conflict between Axel, a dangerously violent serial rapist and murderer on death row, and the prison's guards, led by a man called Morrison. While other conflicts between masculinities discussed so far have had very clear examples of successful masculinities dominating unsuccessful masculinities, the prison setting of *Last Penalty* results in a more complex interaction of masculinities. Axel is the kind of character who would, in other stories, be unambiguously dominant; he is physically large, violent, muscular, sexually aggressive and enjoys undermining the masculinity of the guards for his own amusement. When told to strip down before his execution, he takes the opportunity to brag about this being the first time the guards have seen 'a real man's body' (p. 5) and, when naked, says that the way the guards are staring at him will cause him to 'get a hard on' (p. 6). The guards' only response to Axel is to use their authority as guards to try silencing him while they march him to his execution: 'Shut up!' (p. 4), 'Hurry up asshole!' (p. 5), 'Stop fucking around!' (p. 6). It is only when Axel is naked and locked in the gas chamber that the guards are confident that they have turned the tables enough to gloat, telling Axel that he's 'Finally going to pay' (p. 6), and pump in gas that transforms Axel into a woman.

While Axel is by far the most masculine, dominant individual character in *Last Penalty*, as a hated criminal confined within a prison by guards he is not supported by Connell's 'play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power' (Connell, 1987, p. 184) required for him to be dominant in a social sense. Indeed, as Connell states in *Gender and Power*, hegemonic masculinity derives its power from the 'cultural ideal' (ibid) of masculinity, not any specific male's embodiment, and that one such cultural ideal is 'law and order' (ibid). The result is a situation marked by tension between masculinities: On an individual, person level, Axel embodies certain masculine traits far more effectively than any of the guards do, and the result is that he is powerful enough to overwhelm individual guards in personal confrontations; Connell's 'contests of brute power'. However, Axel's criminal behaviour is so anti-social and contemptuous of authority that he lacks any form of social or institutional support, leaving him ultimately powerless when faced with the institutional power of the prison and criminal justice systems. Axel's subsequent transformation from a 'real man' into a woman whom the guards sexually and physically dominate functions to resolve this tension, and will discuss this after firstly looking at how *Last Penalty* portrays emphasised femininity.

The now-female Axel is then locked in a cell with no way out, and is forced to have sex with the guards whenever they desire it. While this suggests a traumatic, dehumanising life of sexual slavery, *Last Penalty* ultimately depicts Axel as enjoying their new role after they become 'accustomed' to it (p. 23). This new, female Axel is depicted as thinking about little more than sex, begging the guards to have sex with them, moaning 'I just can't wait

anymore. Please put it in' (p. 22) while pulling their vulva open. This chapter will now discuss two observations about Axel's behaviour and the role forced upon them.

Firstly, Axel's female self is depicted as embodying emphasised femininity. Their physical appearance is described variously in *Last Penalty* as 'lustful' (p. 25), 'beautiful', (ibid), 'provocative' (ibid) and 'hot' (p. 27); a representation that repeatedly emphasises that men find Axel's body to be highly sexually attractive. In terms of behaviour, Axel is initially not depicted as having any interest in leaving their cell, which does not even appear to contain furniture, and is depicted begging the guards to 'please' (p. 22) have sex with them. Ultimately, Axel's role is constructed around satisfying the sexual desires of the male guards. They are available at all times for sexual intercourse and appear to enjoy it, but also remain sexually passive, begging the guards if they can 'please' have sex rather than making explicit demands or initiating sex without their consent. On the basis of this depiction of Axel as an extremely feminine woman who does not appear to have any interests outside of sex with men, Axel's female self is constructed around an extreme version of Connell's emphasised femininity. The second observation follows from this, and it is that, by transforming Axel into this image of emphasised femininity, the prison guards have successfully resolved the tension between themselves and Axel, as this exaggerated femininity is subordinate to all forms of masculinity. As was discussed earlier, the tension in the narrative is derived from a conflict between the masculinity of Axel and the masculinities of the guards, with neither party able to comprehensively dominate the other, due to the guards possessing institutional, authoritative power but not being able to match Axel in terms of physical or psychological aggression. However, as the female Axel is explicitly described as physically far smaller and weaker than the male Axel, and is depicted as entirely passive and receptive of

the guards' sexual desires, the masculinity of the prison guards is dominant. What is unknown to the guards, however, is that Axel's passivity is a ruse designed to lure them into a false sense of security; when engaged in intercourse with a guard, Axel takes advantage of his vulnerability, knocks him unconscious and escapes back to the street, where they return to a life of crime.

Axel's life of crime while female is depicted as far more successful, lucrative and safe than her criminal activities while male. This is ultimately because Axel has learned to use emphasised femininity as a way to catch men off guard, relying on their own assumptions about femininity being innately supportive, compliant and non-confrontational to mask the fact that Axel poses a threat. This was first demonstrated with Axel's escape, as they 'tempted' (p. 22) a guard with sexual access to their naked body, something the guards were so used to that it was described as 'no big deal' (ibid). The guards were also, as depicted earlier in *Last Penalty*, first-hand witnesses to Axel's transformation, and thus knew that the woman in the cell was once a violent man who threatened and abused his captors. Despite knowing this, however, the guards apparently exercised so little caution around the female Axel that they were able to overpower one, knock him unconscious and escape the prison. This was possible because the guards, when presented with a woman who so perfectly embodied emphasised femininity, simply assumed them incapable of doing anything other than servicing them. Male assumptions about feminine passivity are revealed to be Axel's trump card.

Axel's experience with femininity is integrated into their criminal activities, and they become a highly successful serial killer known as 'The Dark Cat Killer' (p. 24). As The Dark Cat

Killer, Axel 'attracts her victims with her beautiful looks and lustful clothing' (p. 25) – high heels, a miniskirt, and a mesh top which barely contains their breasts – then 'sleeps with her victims and robs them of anything valuable' (p. 26). The comic then depicts Axel seducing their next victim, luring him into a dark alley with 'Hey there cutie [...] what do you say we go back to your place?' (pp. 26 – 27). The man, assuming Axel is a prostitute, agrees and begins discussing payment. As Axel gets into the car, they are depicted thinking to themselves 'Thanks Morrison. Even though you didn't mean to do it, you gave me a new life. A better life' (p. 27).

The way this alters the hierarchy is initially straightforward: Axel, while male, is involved in a tense and aggressive tug of war with the prison guards over who is the most masculine, bragging that he is – unlike them – a 'real man' (p. 5), and accusing the guards of being so unmasculine that they are symbolically feminine and are thus sexually attracted to him. This ultimately leads to a stalemate between Axel and the guards, with Axel's personal power overwhelming the guards on an individual basis, but the guards collectively possessing the institutional power to restrain Axel. When Axel becomes female and 'accustomed' (p. 23) to sex with the guards, the clash of masculinities disappears. Axel takes on the role of a passive, feminine woman who exists to sexually service the guards, complementing and reaffirming their masculinity rather than challenging it. While this appears to have resolved the guards' relationship with Axel, their passivity is then revealed to be a ruse, and they escape by incapacitating a guard during intercourse. What is crucial to understanding *Last Penalty* is that Axel's escape and subsequent adoption of the "Dark Cat Killer" identity is that she has learned to use the assumptions surrounding emphasised femininity to her advantage. Axel, when male, was locked in a confrontational struggle with

other men to establish dominance in a hierarchy of masculinities. The prison guards, led by Morrison, were depicted as fearing his muscular, masculine body and its potential for physical harm, and as intimidated by his sexually-charged verbal attacks on their own masculinities. Morrison is depicted as especially eager to see Axel's threatening hyper-masculinity destroyed through emasculation, both metaphorically by announcing that Axel died like a coward, and literally by transforming him into the guards' female sex slave. However, the female Axel, with her voluptuous body, heavy makeup and revealing clothing does not appear to pose the same threat to masculinity that the male Axel did; rather, she appears to complement, support and empower masculinity, flattering her male victim by calling him 'cutie' (p. 26) and 'sugar' (ibid) while offering him a sexual encounter that, as *Last Penalty's* narration explains, will most likely end with Axel murdering the man and stealing his valuables. On the basis of its differing depiction of Axel as both male and female, and female Axel's statement that she explicitly has 'a better life' (p. 27), *Last Penalty* presents a female body and emphasised femininity as a preferable state for Axel than a male body and masculinity, and that this aids in her criminal activities, making her a more successful criminal than she was as a man. This is because Axel, while female, is able to use masculine assumptions about femininity to their advantage, with men perceiving them as a passive source of sex and flattery rather than a rival with whom to engage in hierarchical struggle; not expecting to be dealing with a calculating criminal, their victims then become easy targets. In this way, Axel's transformation from male to female, and their subsequent adoption of emphasised femininity, invert their situation from a criminal whose intimidating masculinity is feared to a criminal whose victims willingly come to her in the belief that, as a highly feminine woman, they are incapable of truly victimising them, or doing anything other than serving their desires.



The example taken from *The Watch* is that of Leo Harper. Leo is first introduced, though not named, in the story *SchizophrANNEia* (Onymous & Ericson, 2003c), in which he and his three male friends are transformed from boys to girls, and then given further development in the 2005 story *Consequences* (Onymous & Ericson, 2005b), which follows their lives after the transformation. The transformation of Leo, as with Axel, allows them to reconfigure a previously aggressive relationship into a supportive one. However, because the kinds of masculinity represented in *The Watch* are unlike those in *Last Penalty*, the support offered takes a different form.

Leo is one of a group of four male football players at Tandy Gardens (“TG”), the high school in which much of *The Watch* is set. These four boys mercilessly bully other students, male and female, who they perceive as acceptable targets, leading to one of their victims describing them as ‘[T]he biggest jerks in the whole school. Always needing to prove how tough and manly they were, and mostly putting down other kids to do it’ (Onymous & Ericson, 2005b, p. 15). Their target is Wolfie, a female student who wishes to join the wrestling team. Their reaction is immediate and direct: The four boys surround her, physically trapping her, and announce ‘Girls don’t belong on the wrestling time, Wolfie! I think we need to teach you why’ (Onymous & Ericson, 2003b, p. 20) as they close in on her. It is only another student’s manifestation of hidden magical powers that prevents the bullies from making good on their threat. In *Consequences*, the audience learns more about Leo, who has now vanished, from one of his male victims, Preston. Preston, a member of a fantasy role-playing club, reveals that Leo actually had a secret interest in fantasy role-playing and participated in their club, but threatened ‘pummelings ‘round the clock if we

told *anyone* he was into this stuff' (Onymous & Ericson, 2005b, p. 26) and was 'ashamed' (ibid) to be associated with them. Returning to the 'canonical narratives' of high school masculinity mentioned by Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman (2001), Leo and his three friends are Tandy Gardens' example of adolescent male hegemonic masculinity, embodying "hardness', sporting prowess [...] dominance and control' (Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman, 2001, p. 77). On the basis of this characterisation, these four boys, including Leo, are the bearers of hegemonic masculinity among the students at Tandy Gardens. Furthermore, although hegemonic masculinity is 'achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power' (Connell, 1987, p. 184), it is also 'not incompatible [with physical force]' (ibid), particularly 'violence [which] backs up a dominant cultural pattern' (ibid), explaining their pervasive physical bullying of other students. The dominant cultural pattern which privileges their particular form of masculinity cannot abide a physical and independent girl like Wolfie, and cannot respect Leo if he is found to be involved in something as creative and introspective as role-playing, so both must be suppressed through the threat of physical violence wielded by the boys. Thus, the boys function as both the bearers of hegemonic masculinity among Tandy Gardens' students, and are also directly responsible for reinforcing the school's patriarchal hierarchy by using physical force on other students. Physical force is ultimately trumped by magical powers, however, and the four boys are punished by being transformed into girls, with Leo becoming Lita.

Lita changes personality immediately, telling the other newly-transformed ex-bullies that 'Wolfie's gonna join the wrestling team! We need to support her!' (Onymous & Ericson, 2003c, p. 20), in an overt inversion of their original behaviour. The transformed bullies, now a cheer squad, continue to recur as background characters, and do not play a major role

again until *Consequences*, published two years later. Following up on how Leo has adapted to life as Lita, it is revealed that Lita is now on friendly terms with the group of nerds Leo had previously antagonised. They are aware that Lita was once Leo, and are happy about the change. Unlike Leo, who threatened them, Lita is 'cooler than that' (Onymous & Ericson 2005c, p. 26) and 'not ashamed to talk to us' (ibid). Lita's mother, also aware of the change, explains that while Leo was consumed by his need to be a 'sports hero' (p. 25) and was 'caught up in his public appearance' (ibid), Lita is 'far more apt to just be herself' (ibid) and 'her popularity is higher than ever' (ibid). Lita is depicted happily practicing cheerleading with the three other transformed bullies, smiling and chatting among each other. 'Plus', adds one of the nerds, 'she's *much* more fun to look at' (p. 26). Another character summarises the differences between the male bullies and female cheerleaders: 'Do you wonder why it's been so long before anyone's even bothered to ask where [the boys] went? They were the biggest jerks in the whole school [...] from what I've seen of [the girls] now, they are nice and honest and caring' (p. 15).

*The Watch* is overt in its depiction of Lita being the social inverse of Leo, as both relationships it highlights are depicted as beginning negatively, with Leo as a physical threat, and resolving positively with Lita as a source of support and friendship. Like Axel in *Last Penalty*, Leo begins by embodying a hegemonic, aggressive form of masculinity that places him in conflict with those around him; The nerds, who embody a subordinate form of masculinity, and Wolfie, who embodies a "tomboy" femininity that is not configured around pleasing men (later issues of *The Watch* also hint that Wolfie may be a lesbian). Unlike *Last Penalty*, however, Leo is met with no resistance from his victims; the nerds obey Leo's demand for secrecy for fear of their physical safety, and Wolfie, though a capable wrestler,

is rendered helpless, saved only by the intervention of a reality-warping magic spell. The depiction of Lita following the transformation also in part mirrors the female Axel, with Lita now functioning as someone supportive and nonthreatening.

However, the form the support takes differs, as the masculinity present in *The Watch* is not that of *Last Penalty*; *Last Penalty* dealt with an overtly sexually aggressive masculinity, and so Axel became a female sex slave to complement it, while *The Watch* deals with the masculinity of introverted nerds, and so Lita is a 'cool' girl who plays games with boys and does not mind them ogling her (as discussed in "Acceptance Through Access To Assumed Female Privileges", a lone woman surrounded by men who find her sexually attractive is not represented as in any form of danger). Both the supportive femininities represented align perfectly with the needs of their respective masculinities, responding precisely to what either masculinity requires to justify itself. The femininity embodied by the female Axel is too aggressive and sexual to serve the nerds, who want their niche interests validated by an attractive 'cool' girl, but Lita's femininity does little to support the prison guards' sexually aggressive violence.

#### 'Come, my bouncy servant!': Male vs Female Submission

The final example of femininity functioning as a means to reconfigure a male character's place in a hierarchy is, again, taken from *The Watch*. Professor Suruto, a teacher at Tandy Gardens high school who is forced to take on additional work for no reward or recognition, is transformed from a put-upon middle-aged man into a stereotypical 'dumb blonde' servant by a wizard called Lord Sykos. Suruto's abrupt change in personality,

including an apparently significant loss of intelligence, is later revealed to be a conscious act that Suruto is putting on in order to play the role of an ideal submissive woman to please Sykos. Suruto thereby trades being a submissive man for being a submissive woman, with the latter represented as more rewarding and fun.

Suruto is not given much development as a character, what little time is spent on him depicts him in a subordinate position, where he is overworked, ignored and treated thanklessly. Suruto is initially a recurring background character, but is given a more sizeable role in *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (Onymous & Ericson, 2006c), which also writes him out of the series in what is presented as a happy ending for the character. Suruto's initial appearance in *Something Wicked This Way Comes* depicts him setting up the Tandy Gardens gymnasium for a concert the following day. He is not setting up the gym by choice; it is something he 'had to' (Onymous & Ericson, 2006c, p. 9) do alone. The unreasonable and unappreciated nature of Suruto's situation is not lost on him, as he is depicted constantly complaining: '[S]etting up the gym myself. This is just cr--' (p. 4), 'I had to set up this whole gym myself' (p. 9), 'I'm the only one here' (ibid). Suruto's appearance, though brief, establishes him as someone who lacks control over the work he is doing, is doing far more work than is reasonable, cannot count on assistance and, despite being aware of how unreasonable his situation is, cannot do anything about it and is reduced to fruitlessly complaining. Suruto's means of escaping this life is the character of Lord Skyos, presented as Suruto's opposite.

In contrast to the passive and put-upon Suruto, Sykos is depicted as over-indulged and virtually omnipotent, able to alter reality on a whim to suit his desires. Sykos is shown

to live in a lavish castle, where he is waited on by a staff consisting exclusively of young women over whose physical bodies he exercises complete control, turning one into stone (Onymous & Ericson, 2005a, p. 40) because she overcooked his eggs, and later transforms her statue body into a fountain because he prefers the look (Onymous & Ericson, 2006c, p. 2). When he leaves his castle to travel to Earth, Sykos is so used to being surrounded by submissive women that, prior to his arrival, he sends a message with the demand 'Please take the time to prepare a welcoming party of at least thirteen maidens' (p. 4). Upon reaching Earth and discovering that no welcoming party is present, Sykos takes matters into his own hands and uses his magic powers to transform the people he meets, male and female, into his new personal entourage of young women. These women, including those who were formerly male, have their physiques subject to what Sykos refers to 'enhancements' (p. 12), with their breasts growing larger, their clothing shrinking to reveal more skin, two having their skin tones exchanged, and another two turned into female human / animal hybrids. Being a wizard from another dimension, it is difficult to determine where Sykos personally stands in relation to hegemonic masculinity, although on Earth he does function to uphold it. While Sykos is depicted as a powerful male character, his power comes from the magic spells he casts, not an interplay of social forces, and he would retain this power even in a society without patriarchy or gender roles. However, Sykos is depicted as aware of, and heavily invested in, patriarchal hierarchy, surrounding himself with subservient women whose bodies he alters without their consent to make them more appealing to him, and considers women who are more feminine to have been 'enhanced'. In a sense, his power is a kind of magical male gaze; Sykos 'projects [his] phantasy on to the female which is styled accordingly' (Mulvey, 1989 p. 19).

Ultimately, while Sykos' power does not derive from hegemonic masculinity, he nonetheless uses his power to uphold and reinforce hegemonic masculinity through 'dominant cultural patterns' (Connell, 1987, p. 184) by forcing women into a subservient position to men and transforming their bodies in accordance with male sexual entitlement. Furthermore, Sykos' omnipotence and constant indulgence of his desires positions him as the opposite of the put-upon and unfulfilled Suruto. Having described the initial hierarchical relationships presented – those of Leo and the nerds, and Sykos and his unwilling maidens – this chapter will now discuss how these relationships are reconfigured.

The transformation of Suruto into one of Sykos' maidens is, notably, met with enthusiasm and delight on the part of Suruto. While other victims of Sykos' transformations are seen to retain the original sense of self and react with horror and confusion to their transformed bodies, Suruto, upon transformation into a voluptuous young woman named Aimee, leaps in the air and squeals with delight. Sykos then christens Aimee 'my bouncy servant' (Onymous & Ericson, 2006c, p. 10) in reference to their large breasts. Aimee trails Sykos through the remainder of *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, and is depicted as a stereotypical "dumb blonde", responding to events with childish lines like 'Oooo, floaty!' (ibid), 'Yay! Fun!' (ibid), 'Oooo, pretty!' (p. 11) and 'Shiny!' (p. 16), and also unable to differentiate between a flower and a rock (p. 21). Aimee is also seen to dote on and flatter Sykos, telling him 'You are awesome' (p. 16) and using the pet name 'Sykie' (p. 24). On the basis of their portrayal as an attractive young woman who dotes on Sykos, is constantly enthusiastic and does not appear to be able to function without him, Aimee is an almost perfect embodiment of emphasised femininity. This is not, however, the end of the

discussion of Aimee and Sykos, as the final act of *Something Wicked This Way Comes* reveals another side of the character.

When Sykos is finally defeated, he is ordered by Anne, *The Watch's* protagonist, to change the maidens back into their original selves. Aimee, however, intervenes, taking Anne aside to talk in private. Aimee's expression then changes from their previous bubbly happiness to a knowing cynicism, and says 'Seriously, Anne, don't ruin this for me' (p. 24), before reverting to their inane grin, giving Sykos a thumbs up and announcing 'It's cool!' (ibid). Aimee then adoringly clings to Sykos, and the two return to Sykos' castle, where Aimee is last seen wrapped around Sykos and calling him 'Honey bear' (p. 38) and discussing what he wants them to cook. Given that Sykos is surprised to see Aimee so enthusiastic after their transformation, and Aimee's private aside to Anne, *Something Wicked This Way Comes* appears to be suggesting that Suruto's mind remained intact after the transformation, and they are intentionally playing the part of Sykos' "bouncy servant" because it is preferable to being a man who gets no respect and has no control over his life. However, Sykos' explicit description of Aimee as a "servant" means that Aimee is not necessarily any freer than Suruto was. What Suruto gains by becoming Aimee is *not* an escape from a hierarchical situation in which he is expected to do other people's work for them, as their life as Aimee seems to consist of nothing but. What Suruto does gain, however, is an ostensibly *complementary* hierarchical position, in which Aimee is appreciated and given positive reinforcement for her role as Sykos' glamorous, sexy servant; a far cry from the anonymity, isolation and disrespect faced by Suruto. Suruto's subordinate masculinity becomes Aimee's emphasised femininity, resolving the tension that led to Suruto's frustration and boredom at the hands of the Tandy Gardens' faculty.



## REJECTED TO DESIRED CONCLUSION

As this commentary on Rejected to Desired has argued, what unifies these stories is that they are articulating anxiety from a masculinist standpoint which sees men as constantly running the risk of failing to live up a hegemonic masculine ideal, but does not see any comparable situation for women.

Hegemonic masculinity is, for the transformed men in these stories, always out of reach. Those who are resigned to embodying a subordinate masculinity, like the fat and emotionally fragile protagonist of *Temazcal*, or the put-upon and powerless Suruto, lead lives of frustration and self-doubt with no sense that they can escape their lot. Those who have not given up and still attempt to embody a successful, though non-hegemonic, form of masculinity are met with a string of failures, such as the petty thugs without a gang of their own in *Rabbit's Foot*, or the men in *Rave New World* and *Infinite Stories* who simply wish to enjoy themselves but are rejected by a world which values female beauty more than male subjectivity. Other men overcompensate for their masculinity, resulting in situations like the self-parody "himbo" TJ, or the violent, hypermasculine sex criminal Axel. Masculinity is, in these stories, an ongoing performance which men struggle to maintain; its ontology is unnatural and it is imposed from outside forces upon male bodies which cannot cope with its demands.

Femininity, however, is represented as not just masculinity's relational opposite, but specifically its ontological opposite; it is an essential component of female bodies that is

represented as coming from *within* rather than *without*. In those stories where the male protagonist simply transforms into a woman who is already feminine, such as *Rave New World* and *The Gallery*, it is simply seen as something female bodies automatically “do”. The same is true of stories in which transformed male characters partake in female beauty rituals. The beauty rituals undertaken by TJ, Tony and Axel are only depicted as happening *once*, and immediately result in a perfectly feminine performance that never changes. Beauty rituals in these stories are represented not as outside forces shaping female bodies into something more desirable to patriarchy, but as “releasing” an essential femininity which was simply lying dormant within the female body and, once asserted, does not require maintenance.

Masculinity is also represented as under attack from outside forces. Men, even hegemonically masculine ones, are represented as a legally segregated second class, manipulated and led around by women who see them as a means to an end, engaged in tugs of war with other men over who is in charge, and treated like stupid, violent animals without emotions as a result of negative stereotypes. This is, again, represented as the opposite situation to that of women, who are doted by adoring men, given special legal privileges (at the expense of men), able to flaunt their sexuality to get whatever they want, and are “free” to pursue creative and fulfilling lives without the burden of having a social role forced on them.

It is wrong to simply claim these stories are pure backlash, as they do not demonstrate an explicit longing for the world to go back to an earlier, pre-feminist time, or for women’s rights to be wound back in the name of an ostensible “equality”. While there

are notable *parallels* with the reactionary antifeminists, particularly the representation of women as having attained the freedom to do whatever they want while men are trapped in a traditional gender role that restricts and harms them. Unlike the antifeminist discourse, though the solution these stories present is not that society change to better accommodate the demands of men but that men who feel victimised by this situation change *themselves* from male to female. However, while these stories appear to be *jealous* of women's assumed freedom, they do not appear to be suggesting these freedoms be removed and society return to more traditional gender roles, as the Men's Rights Activists discussed earlier do. It is as though the standpoint of these stories simply sees the contemporary West as a society where women enjoy unparalleled freedom, and simply wish to take part in this.

Women are, for example, represented as perfectly safe, content and even empowered while being surrounded by crowds of men who refuse to leave, trapped in a room filled with naked and sexually aroused men, becoming the servant of a man who then abducts you, being repeatedly harassed by a man who insists on dating them despite their constant refusal, performing sexually for their boss in order to get a raise, and other situations which a standpoint that takes any critique of patriarchy into account would consider extremely dangerous. Other examples of such a standpoint include the way that female beauty rituals are depicted as quick and cheap, successful women are described as 'spoiled', teenage girls feel welcomed by the prospect of role-playing with men who are explicitly lusting after them, and that women can use their sex appeal to extort gifts from men. These women embody the "emphasised femininity" identified by Connell, and their performance is configured entirely around being subordinate to male desires, yet "TG" media still presents them as in control.

These “TG” media narratives are the intersection of these anxieties. Anxiety over failing to embody masculinity intersects with a belief that women are not haunted by the same spectre of failed gender embodiment, which intersects with a belief that men are trapped by gender roles in a way women are not. The anxiety over failure is thus resolved through transformation from male to female, as the standpoint assumes an ontology of femininity which cannot fail. The following chapter will further develop this anxiety over the repressive nature of masculinity and the assumed freedom that femininity offers.

## 8. SOCIAL INVERSION 2: RESTRAINED TO FREE

In the 545 “TG” media narratives analysed in this project, the Restrained to Free Social Inversion was identified in fifty-nine of them, making it the second most commonly depicted form of Social Inversion, behind Rejected to Desired (with 60) but ahead of Ordinary to Supernatural (with 41). Unlike the previously discussed Rejected to Desired narratives, Restrained to Free narratives feature male protagonists who do not fail to embody masculinity, and are accepted by those around them as unproblematic, gender-normative males, even if their masculinity is not the hegemonic form. However, in adhering to the standards of normative masculine gender expression, the protagonist’s full capacity for self-expression, individuality, sexuality and personal development has been inhibited; something which he may or may not be consciously aware of. When the protagonist is transformed from male to female, they find that, as they are no longer inhibited by the requirements of behaving in a masculine way, they are now free to express themselves in ways which were previously incompatible with heteronormative masculinity. Furthermore, as with the “TG” narratives discussed in Chapter 7, these stories present femininity as far less restrictive than masculinity, and the protagonist, once female, can still partake in any traditionally masculine activities they enjoyed while male and not face any social stigma for it. This was also a feature of the “TG” narratives discussed in Chapter 7, but in the ones discussed in this chapter, this increased freedom of expression is brought to the fore more so than those in Chapter 7.

As with the earlier analysis of Rejected to Desired narratives in Chapter 7, this analysis of Restrained to Free argues that these narratives are articulating anxieties about masculinity born of a perceived contradiction between two intersecting beliefs. The first of these is that successfully embodied masculinity is *complementary* to successfully embodied femininity, and that because it is complementary, a man who embodies masculinity successfully is not whole; he has rejected or refused to develop ostensibly “feminine” traits, such as emotional expression or domestic skills, because it is understood that these are the responsibility of his female partner. This was recognised by the “Men’s Liberation” movement of the 1970’s, as discussed in Chapter 3, and will be developed throughout this chapter with a greater emphasis on feminist theorists. Aspects of this relationship between masculinity and femininity were discussed in Chapter 7 which, in part, dealt with R.W. Connell’s model of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ and its relationship to a complementary, and subordinate, ‘emphasised’ or ‘complementary’ model of femininity.

The severity of the impact that emotional inhibition has on men has been documented by both progressives and reactionaries across multiple disciplines. Beginning with psychological studies (which do not take a reactionary stance), Doka and Martin’s 2000 research on gendered grieving, *Men Don’t Cry... Women Do*, for example, found that men are not only more likely to respond to grief by turning to ‘distractions such as work, sex, play and alcohol’ (Doka & Martin, 2000, p. 100) rather than grieving openly, but also that, in line with this gendered expectation, men were also less likely to be offered alternative means of grieving. Korobov (2011) finds that men expect women to function as ‘the committed, serious and often primary emotional caretaking partner of the relationship’ (Korobov, 2011, p. 56), and are rendered vulnerable and defensive when met with a ‘failure to prioritize his

emotional comfort' on behalf of their female partners. Similarly, Lynch & Kilmartin (2013) observe that men are taught to respond to problems by "doing" rather than "feeling", leading to men projecting their negative emotions onto external sources rather than working through them. '[M]en have learned to detach themselves from the awareness of feelings that have been culturally defined as unmasculine [...] As a result, there is an emotional void in the lives of many men' (Lynch & Kilmartin, 2013, p. 7), and 'Even [...] aware of their problems, they are less likely to seek help in a culture that considers help-seeking to be unmanly' (p. 21).

The male reliance on women for emotional caretaking is further explored by Joiner (2011), who observes that, while women maintain close friendships and make new friends throughout their lives, men easily lose touch with their friends and rarely make new ones after reaching adulthood, leading to the lack of an effective support network and, in the absence of a female partner, extreme isolation. Wolfgang Rutz's research into the 'striking paradox' (Rutz, 2000, p. 183) that 'male mortality is so high [...] despite low male morbidity rates' (ibid) relates the higher rate of male suicide to the concept of alexithymia – the inability to articulate one's emotions. From a feminist perspective, psychologist Carol Gilligan's study of women's communication revealed what she terms 'a feminine ethic of care' (Gilligan, 1995, p. 122), which is 'an ethic of special obligations and interpersonal relationships [...] selflessness or self-sacrifice [...] built into the very definition of care' (ibid). Under patriarchy, women are, argues Gilligan, obligated to perform care as 'unpaid labor' (ibid) in order to maintain the stability of personal relationships with men, 'bound internally and externally by obligations to care without complaint, on pain for becoming a bad woman: unfeminine, ungenerous, uncaring' (ibid). This places a stigma on independent women,

creating a toxic co-dependency in which men are dependent on women to perform emotional labour, and women must provide this or risk losing men's material support. As this chapter will demonstrate, "TG" media does not represent this as co-dependency which serves the interests of patriarchy, but – as with antifeminist reactionaries – a problem which solely affects men, who are represented as isolated, repressed and deprived of much-needed emotional support. Male labour is also the only form of labour recognised, with men represented as overworked and self-sacrificing, while women are doted on, with their only concern being performing sexually for men – which is, of course, represented as mutually pleasurable. This recalls the reactionary literature discussed in the introductory chapters which called for women to return to traditional femininity and reclaim it as a form of personal indulgence. This, of course, runs counter to Gilligan's argument, in which the embracing of femininity is 'an initiation into a kind of selflessness, which is associated with care and connection' (p. 124), but also leads to 'a muting of voice, lead[ing] to inner feelings of sadness and isolation. In effect, the young woman becomes shut up within herself' (ibid).

The adverse effect of masculinity on men's emotional coping strategies are also cited by both "pro-male" and explicitly antifeminist writers as evidence that, rather than benefiting from patriarchy, men suffer a myriad of disadvantages that at best cancel out their patriarchal dividend and at worst result in them ultimately occupying a subordinate position to women; an overt inversion of feminist arguments. Sociologist Anthony Synott (2009) suggests that the social pressures placed on men should be seen as a kind of "tax" men pay for their social power. 'Men pay high taxes in so many ways, from early deaths to high suicide rates' (Synott, 2009, p. 14), argues Synott, while further arguing that the traditionally male role of the breadwinner and head of the family should be seen in a



complementary way, as 'patriarchal *donation*, not domination' (ibid, emphasis in original). Farrell (1993/1994) likewise argues that men's inability to cope emotionally without a female caregiver should be understood in terms of male powerlessness, as 'the pressures of the male role' (Farrell, 1993/1994, p. 31) take an emotional toll on boys and men, as they accumulate money to provide for their wives, but are ultimately 'prostitutes to an illusion of emotional security' (p. 203), as their wives can divorce them, leaving them alone and vulnerable. Finally, in their study of negative male stereotypes in popular culture, *Spreading Misandry* (2001), Paul Nathanson and Katharine Young claim that 'At one time, wives were expected to become both legally and economically dependent on their husbands, and husbands to become emotionally dependent on their wives. Now, neither wives nor husbands are expected to become legally or economically dependent. But husbands are still expected to become emotionally dependent on their wives, even though not all wives like the idea' (Nathanson & Young, 2001, p. 53). Meanwhile, the aforementioned work of Gilligan approaches the issue of male dependency on women for emotional labour from a standpoint that acknowledges the toll of masculinity on men's emotional health while not adopting a reactionary position on feminism itself. '[I]n early childhood, this internalization of a patriarchal voice leads to a loss of relationship [...] leaving a psychological wound or scar' (Gilligan, 1995, p. 124).

Secondly, there is the postfeminist position that women have, as a result of the gains made by feminism, been successfully emancipated from their role in this complementary dynamic, with women now sanctioned, and encouraged, to embrace interests and occupations that were previously seen as incompatible with a successful embodiment of femininity. Genz & Brabon (2009/2018) discuss this aspect of postfeminist discourse coming

into being 'as a response to the long-standing feminist critiques of [...] femininity as a patriarchal marker for female powerlessness and oppression' (p. 120), and attempting to 'redefine the meanings and objects associated with femininity [...] Insisting that they are not trapped by their femininity' (p. 121). This discourse is the focus of much of the postfeminist essay collection *All About the Girl* (2004), with contributor Angela McRobbie discussing the postfeminist 'new gender regime' (McRobbie, 2004, p. 3); a world in which 'tropes of freedom and choice [...] are inextricably connected with the category of young woman' (ibid), citing TV shows like *Ally McBeal* and *Sex and the City* as evidence of 'a field of new gender norms [...] in which female freedom and ambition appear to be taken for granted, unreliant on any past struggle (an antiquated word) [...] instead, merely a state into which young women appear to have been thrown' (p. 6). Below this surface, however, McRobbie identifies a reactionary foundation. '[T]he new female subject is, despite her freedom, called upon to be silent, to withhold critique, in order to count as a modern, sophisticated girl' (p. 9), with examples being 'the ironic normalisation of pornography' (ibid), 'an uncritical relation to dominant and commercially produced sexual representations which actively invoke hostility to assume feminist positions from the past' (ibid), and that contemporary young women are expected to be 'so liberated [...] that they can, again with a touch of irony, reexplore tradition' (ibid).

Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards' contribution to the collection, meanwhile, places an emphasis on femininity being valuable in and of itself, provided that it is a choice rather than a requirement: 'The feminist movement of the 1960s until today did a very good job of ensuring that females of all ages could be valued in society for more than our sex appeal [...] but what they overlooked in this process of ensuring that women were "taken

seriously” is that some women – and men – are drawn to feminine things (ie. “unserious” things) [...] feminine things weren’t really the problem, being forced to adopt them was’ (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004, p. 61). However, they stress that ‘We can’t replace one set of rules (glorifying male roles) with another (glorifying traditional femininity). The third wave goal is to present a range from which feminists can feel comfortable to express themselves’ (p. 63). This leads to a heavy emphasis on defending women’s personal choices against accusations of being antifeminist, on the basis that, so long as women have a choice in the matter, the choice itself is an articulation of feminist power: ‘The personal decisions they make – having boyfriends, shaving, Brazillian bikini waxes, getting married, wanting to have a body like Gwyneth Paltrow, being into fashion – leave others to assume they are the dupes of the patriarchy [...] But the fact is that beyond these personal dilemmas, these young women are organizing the Take Back the Night marches, they are demanding that they be able to play sports with the boys and they are being whatever they want to be’ (p. 66). They conclude by arguing that ‘girls today – both the ten-year-old with skinned knees and the thirty-five-year-old with the vibrator – possess a freedom and fierceness that women in the 1960s could hardly imagine’ (p. 67).

This postfeminist focus on individual choices is not without substantive criticism from within feminism. Genz & Brabon’s survey of postfeminism (2009/2018) notes that the position described above ‘has been dismissed by critics as [...] opportunist’ (Genz & Brabon 2009 p. 146) and as a ‘glamorised, all-achieving, stress- and problem free media invention’ (p. 145) with little application outside a small group of privileged white western women. Banyard’s *The Equality Illusion*, discussed in Chapter 3, argues that this rhetoric ‘fails to take account of coercive forces [...] It fails to recognise that [women’s] “choices” and actions

reflect gender inequality' (Banyard, 2010 p. 22). Moreover, 'feminism isn't defined by a process (choice) but by an aim [...] Simply basing feminism on the individual act of choosing fails to take into account how practices such as dieting and plastic surgery are connected with gender inequality' (ibid). Rosalind Gill's review of postfeminist engagements (Gill, 2017) further develops this line of thought, noting 'an emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and self-discipline, a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment [...] has taken hold and become hegemonic' (Gill, 2017, p. 616). Gill argues that this shift from female objectification to "subjectification" – a concept discussed later in this chapter – has resulted in increased anxiety and self-consciousness, with the pressure to look sexually appealing 'spreading out to include new temporalities (old age, childhood, pregnancy) [...] extending across new areas of the body requiring product solutions' (ibid). Gill further details how such "choices" are packaged as a form of rebellion, 'a re-signification of practices critiqued by feminists' (p. 614) as a means to distance oneself from 'an assumed-to-be-judgemental feminism' (p. 615), recalling the postfeminist critiques of the backlash cited in Chapter 3.

This postfeminist position that women are now fully liberated to do as they choose has been seized upon by pro-male and antifeminist writers, who argue that, in contrast to a more malleable postfeminist femininity, masculinity remains constraining and limited. Benatar's *The Second Sexism* (2012), asks the reader to 'Consider, for example, the different attitudes toward "tomboys" (girls who have traditionally masculine dispositions) with "sissies" (boys with allegedly feminine characters) [...] many activities that used to be termed tomboyish – such as wearing pants or playing sport – no longer are. Boys playing with dolls are likely to be ridiculed in a way that girls playing with trucks are not' (Benatar, 2012, p. 241). Benatar also uses the example of women being encouraged to take on

careers as either doctors or nurses, while men are only encouraged to become doctors, not nurses: 'Even if it is true that men are not being told they *cannot* become nurses, and if they are not thereby being oppressed, it is still true that some individual men are *unfairly disadvantaged* (in ways that women are not) by societal pressures that militate against them becoming nurses' (ibid, emphasis in original). Nathanson and Young's *Spreading Misandry* (2001) dedicates a chapter to the ways in which men are 'Separate but Unequal' (Nathanson & Young, 2001, p. 49), noting that – for example – it is acceptable for women to 'routinely wear pants and short hair' (p. 65), but men who wear women's clothing are mocked and belittled, concluding from this that 'it is considered legitimate for women to challenge gender stereotypes, but not for men to do so' (ibid). Warren Farrell's *The Myth of Male Power* (1993/1994) claims that we have now entered 'The Era of the Three-Option Woman and the No-Option Man' (Farrell, 1993/1994, p. 52), referring to the belief that women can choose to enter the workforce, raise their family or a mixture of the two, while men have no option but to enter the workforce and remain there until retirement, which allows women to 'tailor her role to her personality' (p. 183). Genz & Brabon survey of postfeminist discourse connects these reactions to a fear that 'the transforming gender roles of the 1970s and 80s [...] had made [men] go "soft"' (Genz & Brabon, 2009/2018 p. 203); the claim that men cannot challenge masculinity was, rather, a demand that patriarchy remain unchallenged and women return to their traditional role.

This postfeminist representation of a world where men are being forced out of traditionally male spheres, particularly the workforce, with nowhere left to go, has been the subject of criticism from within feminism. Banyard (2010) notes the high number of women sacked for becoming pregnant, the substantial gap in wages between women and men, and

that women entering the workforce is only novel for the middle-classes; '[working class] women have always had to combine work and caring [...] that question is redundant; if they don't work, their family doesn't eat' (Banyard, 2010, p. 75). Genz & Brabon (2009/2018) also criticise the narrative of the postfeminist woman's freedom to tailor their work/life balance. While the narratives of a "man-cession", such as that of Rosin (2012) claim that 'the struggling middle class [...] is slowly turning into a matriarchy, with men absent [...] and women making all the decisions' (Rosin, 2012 p. 3) easily gain traction, Genz & Brabon argue that this is because the narrative 'encapsulates broader cultural anxieties about male obsolescence [...] represented in terms of a feminization' (Genz & Brabon, 2009/2018 p. 200); the recession and austerity have harmed women far more than men, but wounded masculinity is more impactful.

In light of the above, it appears as though these Restrained to Free narratives are articulating anxieties formed at the intersection of these two belief structures. Masculinity is seen as rigid and incomplete, with men struggling to stay within socially acceptable boundaries of masculine behaviour, denying himself the full range of personal expression because he understands that the gaps in his self will be filled by the emotional caretaking of women. However, women, newly emancipated, are now oversaturated with potential choices, allowing women the choice to defy conventional gender stereotypes should they find femininity too restrictive. In this way, women are seen as able to move into traditionally male fields while retaining the qualities that Baumgardner and Richards identified as "girlie". The Restrained to Free narratives reify reactionary anger at this perceived unfairness, with their male protagonists forced to play a male role they find personally unfulfilling, but then, upon transforming from male to female, find that they can now strike

a harmonious balance, incorporating previously unsanctioned elements of femininity with the elements of masculinity they found personally fulfilling to create an unrestrained “free” self.

This is, of course, reminiscent of the discussion of gender ontology in Chapter 3 and Chapter 6. Specifically, it brings to mind Butler’s (1990/1999) theory of performativity, not simply because these narratives represent gender as performed, but because it represents masculinity specifically as near-impossible to embody “authentically”, in line with Butler’s conceptualisation of gender as always inauthentic and prone to failure. It does not, however, view femininity in this way, as discussed earlier in this introduction, and also in Chapter 6. This specific focus on masculinity as a site of personal failure also recalls Kimmel (2008) and Segal’s (1990) observations on male anxiety, in particular Kimmel’s work on young men policing each other while attempting to “mime” masculinity; Pascoe’s (2007) observations on male peer-policing, quoted at length in Chapter 7, are also relevant here.

To offer a properly coherent analysis of these themes, this section is divided into two sub-sections dealing with what were identified as the two major thematic strands. The first, “Escape from Responsibility”, covers narratives in which the male protagonist is weighed down by his “real” – ie. traditionally masculine – responsibilities, and, through transforming from male to female, is able to escape them for a life of indolence, free from the demands that plagued him as a man, echoing the representation of women in the previous chapter, especially the discussion of emphasised femininity. The second, “Femininity as Less Restrictive than Masculinity”, covers narratives in which the male protagonist is transformed from male to female and finds that femininity allows for a wider and more

complete range of expression, whether it is articulating emotions or simply enjoying oneself without fear of what others think. This further demonstrates that “TG” media narratives are written from a masculinist standpoint, with women’s labour presented as a natural, self-gratifying indulgence, while men’s labour is presented as a thankless hardship.



## ESCAPE FROM RESPONSIBILITY

*'A taste of what life could have been': Escaping Adult Male Loneliness for Life as a Young Girl*

This section addresses two transformations from the ongoing webcomic *The Watch*, as well as the transformation of the protagonist of the self-contained comic *A Midwinter Fantasy* (Mentalcrash, 2012). In all these cases, an adult man, worn out from adult responsibilities, is transformed into a much younger girl – willingly or unwillingly – and discovers that, as a young girl, he is no longer burdened with the responsibilities he wished to escape. In the first example from *The Watch*, the character can change back and forth at will, allowing him to “relax” as a small girl, and in the remaining two examples, the change is permanent. I will begin with this first example.

Evan Onymous is a recurring character in the webcomic *The Watch*, and is the older brother of the comic's main character, Anne Onymous. Anne is high school student in her mid-teens, while Evan is a computer technician in his early 20's, and they both live together in a house owned by their (perpetually absent) parents. When Anne's friends from high school, Robin and Jason, come by her house to check up on her, however, they are met at the front door by female toddler called Lily, who refers to Anne as 'sis' (Onymous & Ericson, 2002b, p. 8). Anne sends Lily away to 'watch TV or something' (ibid) and explains that Lily is a girl she babysits. When pressed, however, Anne tells Lily that she is 'gonna change you back a little early tonight' (p. 10) and reveals that Lily is, in fact, an alternate form of Evan.

Evan explains that he uses Anne's magic (along with an amulet) to willingly becoming Lily after work, because 'it's kinda fun to relax as a kid after a long day of working as an adult' (p. 12). When Robin asks Evan why he turns into a small girl rather than a small boy, Evan dismisses it as 'a side effect I can live with' (ibid), and never elaborates further.

As a recurring supporting character, Evan, in both his adult male form and as Lilly (a play on "Little E", ie. "Little Evan") makes numerous appearances throughout *The Watch*, with the recurring motif that spending time as Lilly is an "escape" from his responsibilities, both as a working adult and as a man attempting to perform masculinity. In his second appearance, for example, he is introduced as having just returned from work, wiping the sweat from his brow and exclaiming 'Oi... What a day... There are more people with computer problems in this town than there are problems with computers!' (Onymous & Ericson, 2003d, p. 2). He then requests that Anne provide him 'A nice relaxing evening' (ibid) and she responds by turning him into Lily, prompting Lily to make a series of impulsive demands for childish things: 'I wanna cookie! [...] COOKIE!!! [...] Glass of milk! [...] MILK! [...] Dollies! TV! Coloring! Hide and seek!' (ibid), which Anne finds herself incapable of not giving in to, due to Lilly's constant pestering. This childish impulsiveness is depicted as a recurring aspect of Lilly's behaviour, with Anne unwilling to discipline them, remarking that 'He's a handful when he's her, but... I gotta admit it's cute' (p. 3) and that she 'can't be mad at you when you look like that...' (ibid). When not being impulsively destructive without censure, Lilly enjoys playing with another female toddler, Jennie, something Evan describes as a way to 'unwind after a long day at work by having no adult responsibilities' (Onymous & Ericson, 2003e)

Another recurring character from *The Watch*, Professor Sorgaz, finds himself in a similar situation when he is cursed with the form of a female Japanese teenager. This transformation occurs in the story *SchizophrANNEia* (Onymous & Ericson, 2003c), in which Anne is broken into various copies of herself which all embody a different side of her personality, one of which is her anger, "Anne-Ger". When Anne-Ger attends class in place of the real Anne, she is too impatient and standoffish to take the test that her teacher, Professor Sorgaz, sets for her, flunking it and writing abusive comments in place of essays. When Sorgaz announces he is 'Not a fan of this new attitude!' (Onymous & Ericson, 2003c. p. 10) and sends Anne-Ger to the school counsellor, Anne-Ger retaliates by turning Sorgaz into a stereotypical Japanese schoolgirl caricature, complete with uniform. Sorgaz retains his mind and begs Anne-Ger to turn him back, saying 'I can't be a girl with the mind of a man!' (p. 11). This plea is overheard by the personification of Anne's kindness, however, who responds by altering Sorgaz' mind into that of a teenage Japanese girl, resolving the issue. Sorgaz, who now speaks in broken English, announces 'I feeling much better now! I not even remember problem!' (ibid) and that they are now called Mingmei Wu. Mingmei skips off down the school hall, accompanied by a '\*skip\*' sound effect.

In addition to her use of broken English, Mingmei's Japanese aspect is played up with a series of Japanese stereotypes, such as her wearing a shirt with a design that resembles the protagonist of the anime series *Sailor Moon* (Onymous & Ericson, 2003f, p. 10), transforming into Pikachu from the Japanese video game series *Pokemon* (ibid), transforming into a Japanese folkloric creature called a Tanuki (Onymous & Ericson, 2003b, p. 38), refusing to see movies that aren't anime (Onymous & Ericson, 2005a, p. 4), describing cute things as 'Kawaii! [Japanese for "cute"]' (Onymous & Ericson, 2005b, p. 21)

making her a living racial caricature of the bubbly Japanese schoolgirl stereotype (a later issue of *The Watch* addresses Mingmei's nature as a racial caricature, with a character commenting that "Mingmei Wu" is a Chinese name, and that "Japan" is a nonspecific place of origin). The importance of Mingmei's nonspecifically "Asian" ethnicity will be discussed later in this section.

From this point on, Mingmei becomes a recurring character and member of the friendship clique that the protagonists belong to, attending a slumber party with the other girls (Onymous & Ericson, 2003f, p. 5) and describing herself as 'feeling really, really happy' (Onymous & Ericson, 2005b, p. 21). However, her memories of being Sorgaz slowly begin to resurface, with Mingmei eventually recalling her transformation (p. 22) and that Anne was responsible. Mingmei is then shown to wrestle with the prospect of becoming Sorgaz again, as her friends lament that they'll miss her: 'I guess we'll have to end our weekly [Japanese TV series] Naruto sessions' (ibid), '[no more] hanging out [...] that more than kinda sucks' (ibid), 'you're a really fun girl' (ibid). Mingmei then thinks over her life as Sorgaz: '[my life] wasn't anything to write home about [...] barely a friend to speak of. I was resigned to being mostly alone. It wasn't until [becoming Mingmei] that I got a taste of what life could have been' (p. 23). Ultimately, Mingmei chooses to remain as Mingmei, despite retaining memories of her life as Sorgaz.

The stand-alone ten page comic *A Midwinter Fantasy* by writer and artist Mentalcrash plays out as a combination of the above two examples. Its unnamed protagonist, an adult man, begins the comic by lamenting how overworked he is 'Yesterday was a heavy day, it's morning and I still feel tired' (Mentalcrash, 2012, p. 1). Looking out his

window, he finds a bottle, which he opens, releasing a male genie, Pam, who offers to grant him three wishes. He first wishes for wealth for himself, his family and friends (p. 2), and secondly that 'I want to be super attractive and able to use some of your powers [without becoming a genie]' (p. 3). This causes the genie to turn him into a young woman, which the genie justifies with 'you said you wanted to be attractive' (p. 6). His third wish is to free the genie. The protagonist, now a teenage girl called Micki, is woken up the next morning by Pam, who is now also a teenage girl. Pam and Micki put on school uniforms and skip to school, giggling.

In the three above stories, the appeal of transforming from an adult male to an adolescent female is that it offers the character a means of escaping a life that is both mundane and stressful for a life that is simple and without cares or worries, and that the fact these new lives are female suggests a romanticised view of female childhood as more carefree and sociable than male childhood and male adulthood. This is in sharp contrast to Gilligan's (1995) discussion of girls increasingly muting their voices as they mature, and Butler's (1990/1999) discussion of gender as an ongoing, perpetually failing performance as discussed in the chapter's introduction.

What is common to these three male characters is a combination of exhaustion and social isolation: Evan is explicitly referred to as tired and is not shown to have any friends outside of his younger sister, Sorgaz is open about his life being devoid of excitement, and the unnamed protagonist of *A Midwinter Fantasy* is introduced complaining about how tired he is. Each of their transformations, likewise, shares common traits that are the inverse of this, namely renewed vigour and social engagement: Lily is hyperactive and plays games

with her friend Jenny, Mingmei skips around smiling and has a circle of girlfriends, and Miki (again) happily skips to school with her new friend, Pam. In all three cases, the friendship is platonic and between two or more girls, unlike the heterosexual marriages discussed later in this chapter. These relationships will now be discussed.

The social isolation present mirrors that discussed in this section's introduction, with each male character lacking a source of emotional caretaking, and unable to do the work himself. The character of Evan, in particular, appears to embody Joiner's (2011)'s observations, discussed earlier in this chapter, about men quickly losing touch with their childhood friends after reaching adulthood, and subsequently being unable to make new ones. Within the context of *The Watch*, Evan is one of the few recurring adult characters, aged in his early twenties while the principal cast are aged from fifteen to sixteen. While the principal cast represent a large group of male and female friends who are mutually supportive of one another, however, Evan is, despite being only a few years older than them, almost entirely isolated socially, and has no close relationships with anybody outside of Anne, his sister. Evan is open about this when, in the comic "Adventures in Babysitting", he explicitly lays out what is wrong with his life: When Anne suggests that Evan 'Go out with some friends' (Onymous & Ericson, 2006d, p. 9), he angrily responds 'You mean the friends who have all been too busy with their own schedules to get together at all, or the girl who moved to Maine and didn't want a distance relationship? [...] You used to care about your older brother and your younger sister [ie. Lilly], but lately you don't have time for either!' (ibid), demonstrating Evan's bitter loneliness and emotional dependence on Anne.

Evan's situation is depicted as being resolved *only* through his transformation into Lily, with Evan valuing Lily and Jennie's friendship so much that he is visibly distraught when, in the comic 'Adventures in Babysitting', Evan (temporarily) loses the ability to transform, clasping Jennie's hand and lamenting 'I can't come out and play now' (p. 35). To further underline this, the only adult Evan is depicted as forming any kind of bond with is, predictably, an adult version of Jennie, after a mishap with a spell causes both Lily and Jennie to spontaneously age into adulthood (p. 11). What is especially ominous about *The Watch's* depiction of Evan's situation is that, not only has his social life ceased to exist by his early twenties, but that the kind of man he is – passive, intelligent, and non-physical – mirrors the depiction of *The Watch's* two leads, Robin and Jason, suggesting that the same kind of social disconnection awaits them in only a few years. The character of Sorgaz, who will be discussed next, certainly does little to help the comic's portrayal of male adulthood.

While *The Watch* shows very little of Sorgaz' life as an adult male before he is transformed into Mingmei, the brief snippets we are shown suggest that, like Evan, Sorgaz is socially isolated and lacks any kind of emotional support, to the degree that he has no desire to ever transform back after experiencing life as Mingmei. As Sorgaz says when he argues not be transformed back, life 'wasn't anything to write home about [...] No family left, barely a friend to speak of. I was resigned to being mostly alone, anyway' (Onymous & Ericson, 2005b, p. 23). In contrast, Mingmei has a large group of friends who openly support her, with one embracing her and telling her 'We'll get through this' (p. 15) when her identity crisis begins; she is also variously told she is 'the Japanese sister I never had' (p. 22), 'really fun' (ibid), and that a boy in one of her classes has 'been trying to conjure up the nerve to ask you out for months' (ibid).

Unlike Evan's "relaxation time" as Lilly, Sorgaz's transformation into Mingmei is permanent, with all traces of Sorgaz' life wiped from reality (except, conveniently, for his bank account, which Mingmei retains access too) and replaced by Mingmei's life, meaning that, when Sorgaz argues against being transformed back into his old self, he is also arguing that he should *cease to exist*. While this is not explicitly depicted as a form of suicide, Sorgaz' dialogue and behaviour when confronted with the choice to return to his original self or live on as Mingmei does suggest that Sorgaz sees no value in his life continuing: Lacking any form of emotional support, Sorgaz demonstrates symptoms of the "alexithymia", the inability to articulate one's emotions, identified by Rutz' (2000) study of male suicide discussed in the chapter's introduction.

That Mingmei is nonspecifically "Asian" is also notable, in light of her happy, bubbly portrayal. While much "TG" artwork borrows from Japanese manga and anime aesthetics, Mingmei is the only character in the corpus who is specifically identified as being Japanese (although a character in *The Assault*, discussed later in this chapter, also becomes "Asian", no country of origin is specified). As discussed earlier in this section, however, her "Japanese" status is vague and nonspecific, as she simply hails "from Japan", without a specified hometown or geographic region, and the name "Mingmei Wu" is traditionally Chinese, rather than Japanese. Moreover, Mingmei is – as discussed earlier – associated entirely with Japanese cultural products that Westerners are familiar with; Anime, video games, an "Engrish" dialect, and *shokushu goukan* ("tentacle erotica"; see Ortega-Brena, 2009, for more), with even her transformation into the folkloric Tanuki creature lifted from the popular Nintendo game *Super Mario Brothers III*. Mingmei's *kawaii* ("cute") nature is



suggestive of the observations of Miller's (2011) article "Cute Masquerade and the Pimping of Japan". Miller argues that Japan is understood in the West through a carefully constructed artifice which 'reifies and officially promotes male geek culture' (Miller, 2011, p. 19) by eliding women who 'fail to conform to the narrow model of cute femininity' (ibid), presenting Japanese women as a monolith of infantile cuteness constructed around appealing to Western male geek culture, ignoring 'forms of innovative girl culture that are not easily packaged and exported' (p. 19). Part of this is 'a facile misreading of the aesthetic of cute (kawaii)' (ibid) leading to 'a nonthreatening girlhood' (p. 20) and 'an uncomplicated idea of cuteness' (p. 19) being mistaken for a legitimate expression of Japanese girl culture. Such a description fits the portrayal of the ditzy, video game loving, "Engrish"-speaking Mingmei perfectly. The appeal of Mingmei's life in comparison to Sorgaz is not simply that she has friends, but that her femininity takes the form of Miller's uncomplicated childish cuteness, providing a less stressful alternative to Sorgaz' need to constantly perform adult male masculinity. Miller also discusses the way in which the Western fans catered to 'want a pass for enjoying the often sexist and creepy otaku ["male geek"] products from Japan' (p. 20), aligning with *The Watch* presenting Mingmei's fear of being raped by a tentacled monster as a meta-joke about anime and manga tropes, despite the comic's insistence that its material aims to be "fun" and non-sexual.

The protagonist of *A Midwinter Fantasy* has even less development than Sorgaz, but the pattern remains familiar: He is an adult man, living on his own who, after transforming from male to female, becomes a carefree teenage girl with a supportive friend. In contrast to the unnamed protagonist waking up by himself and groaning about how tired he is after his 'heavy day' (Mentalcrash, 2012, p. 1), Micki is woken up by Pam, who has prepared

Micky breakfast and allows her to sleep in, even though she's going to be 'late again' (p. 8) for school. 'You do take good care of me' (p. 9), says Micki, to which Pam replies 'What else am I supposed to do?' (ibid). While the protagonist is not depicted as anywhere near as isolated as Evan or Sorgaz, the presence of a female emotional support network is still represented as an improvement, with Micki far less stressed now that she is cared for by Pam.

Returning to the material discussed in the introduction, these social networks also demonstrate something akin to Gilligan's "ethics of care". In all three stories, the protagonist is cared *for* by the other women in their life, but this is not reciprocal, even after their transformations. Evan is revealed to be completely dependent on Anne, melting down and berating her when he feels she is not taking his feelings into account; Mingmei is comforted and supported by her friends, with their friendship being Sorgaz' stated reason to never change back; and Micki is able to sleep in and not have to make breakfast, as Pam is there to ensure that she is awake and fed. Despite the protagonist's own transformation from male to female, they are themselves unwilling to adopt Gilligan's "feminine ethic" by caring for others, instead continuing to expect to be cared *for* by the women in their lives. This is particularly evident in Evan's behaviour, as he petulantly lashes out at Anne's perceived neglect of him, as though it is her responsibility to remedy his inability to make friends, and, when in the form of Lilly, rampages throughout the house, causing damage and making constant demands for food and stories from Anne. *The Watch* even has Anne openly acknowledge that Lilly is 'a handful' and 'even when I'm the adult in the situation, you are still "in charge"' (Onymous & Ericson, 2006d, p. 3), but Anne continues to allow Evan to transform in spite of the physical and emotional exhaustion she suffers as a result of caring

for Lilly. Mingmei demonstrates less entitlement, though Sorgaz' primary concern is his own lack of friends – it should also be stressed that Sorgaz is, or was, a teacher, and thus responsible for students, yet does not consider this worth pursuing and abandons it in order to become Mingmei. Micki, meanwhile, sleeps in, refuses to get up, annoys Pam, and has apparently caused them to be late for school on multiple occasions; Pam's response is to mother Micki, wake her up, cook her breakfast and try to ensure they are on time, with no stated motivation beyond 'What else am I supposed to do?'

These three stories are articulating a specific anxiety around men leaving behind their adolescence for an adult life embodying a skewed idea of what being a woman is like. These are men who, unable or unwilling to form new or meaningful relationships after their adolescence, have found that adulthood has been a story of increasing isolation, leaving them with no contacts outside of their family, as with the young Evan, and then no family contacts at all, in the case of the older Sorgaz. Furthermore, the lack of significant women in their lives, whether spouses or simply friends, has resulted in there being no woman 'to care without complaint' (Gilligan, 1995, p. 124) as the men quietly self-destruct, their capacity of heal themselves or reach out stymied by Gilligan's 'psychological wound' (ibid). Through transforming into girls, these men are able to form new social connections with a female social network, providing them with the emotional caretaking they require and cannot provide for themselves – however, in spite of their transformation from male to female, the characters do not themselves adopt the role of an emotional caretaker, continuing to rely on their female friends for support without offering any in return. Ultimately, these stories' response to the anxiety is masculinist, rather than humanist or feminist; the empirical reality that men have problems forming relationships and do not cope well without women to

perform emotional labour for them is understood, but rather than acknowledge this as a patriarchal system which ultimately benefits men, it is rendered as a system in which women simply have an easier time socialising and are less lonely. The toll that selflessness takes on women, identified by Gilligan as 'a muting of voice' and 'inner feelings of sadness and isolation' (Gilligan, 1995, p. 124) is not considered and, in fact, the characters continue to feel entitled to women's emotional caretaking. This is only part of the picture, however, as other stories exist in which a male character is transformed into a female character and, rather than behaving selflessly, learns the value of emotional caretaking – though, again, seen from a masculinist standpoint.

*'Like a huge weight has been taken off my back': Trading Male Labour for "Easier" Female Labour*

The project will now address two comics, *Daddy's Prom* (Infinity Sign & Christie, 2014) and *Playing the Part* (Sturkwurk & Femur, 2011) These are structurally similar to the ones covered above, the difference being that the protagonists are transformed into adult women, rather than young girls, and their male selves are burdened with workplace responsibilities that they escape by marrying a man who will provide for them. These stories also tie into the previously discussed work on Gilligan's (1995) "ethic of care", although they take the opposite approach: In these stories, the protagonist becomes the caring one, finding fulfilment in supporting their husband, escaping from masculinity while also not undermining heteronormative gender roles.

This analysis will begin with the four part comic *Daddy's Prom*, in which a young woman in her final year of high school, Amy, accidentally transforms her father into a young woman resembling 'a regular barbie doll' (Infinity Sign & Christie, 2014, p. 103) with a magic ring that her boyfriend, Jeff, bought her (p. 12). As a stipulation of the ring's magic, Amy's father must go to the prom with a friend of Jeff's. During the week prior to the prom, Amy takes her father clothes shopping (p. 29), teaches them to walk in heels (p. 36), gets their hair styled (p. 64) and shows them to put on bras (p. 90). While Amy's father is initially horrified and uncomfortable, they soon learn to appreciate positive attention from men for their new appearance (p. 37), quickly learning to flirt (p. 52) and make Jeff grovel (p. 97). When the prom finally arrives, Amy's father has a falling out with their date and storms off, meaning that they can never return to being male. Accepting their fate, they announces his retirement and changes their name to Barbara, announcing that '[my male self] won't be missed' (p. 134). Amy's father then realises that, throughout the experience, they have formed a bond with Jeff, and are in love with him. Jeff reveals that his feelings are mutual and breaks up with Amy in order to marry her father. Beginning a new life as Barbara, Amy's father realises this is the life they wanted: 'I've never felt like this before [...] Like a huge weight has been taken off my back' (p. 144).

The experience of the protagonist of *Playing the Part* follows much the same structure. It tells the story of Mickey, a 'middle-aged loser going nowhere fast' (Sturkwurk & Femur, 2011, p. 77) who lives a 'pathetic life' (p. 76) in a 'sad little house' (ibid) and deals with his ennui by drinking heavily at the bar. Driving back from the bar drunk, Mickey misses a red light and collides with a car driven by a young woman, Anna, who is on her way to her wedding. Mickey's body is killed, but his soul is somehow transferred into Anna's. As Anna,

Mickey finds themselves treated with kindness and support by the people they meet – the police officer who was at the accident, as well as Anna’s family and friends – and also finds themselves being subconsciously influenced by Anna’s memories, causing them to behave in feminine ways ‘like following a script’ (p. 33). They come to enjoy Anna’s ‘total babe’ (p. 28) body far more than Micky’s ‘soft and flabby’ (p. 81) male body, and finds that putting clothing on is now ‘actually fun’ (p. 41). Despite initially protesting that ‘I may be in Anna’s body, but this is still *my* life! I’m not going to live hers, not for one more second!’ (p. 75), they find the life of a newlywed woman with no concerns beyond pleasing their husband to be infinitely preferable to that of a lonely, middle-aged alcoholic, and decides to ‘be a *woman* and a *wife*’ (p. 111, emphasis in original).

These stories demonstrate an engagement with the same themes as the stories discussed in the previous section, only with the transformed male character taking the role of the emotional caretaker rather than desiring an emotional caretaker of their own. While the protagonists’ male forms are similar to those of the stories discussed in the previous section of this chapter – lonely adult men who feel worthless – their female forms are adult women ready for marriage, in contrast to the child and adolescent female forms discussed previously.

In both stories, the protagonist is depicted as suffering as a result of being part of the labour force, regardless of how successful they are. While Mickey is stuck in a dead-end job and Amy’s father is a highly successful CEO, both have reached middle age without feeling that they matter to anybody; Mickey is a divorcee with a ‘pathetic life’ (p. 76) and Amy’s father believes he ‘won’t be missed’ (p. 134), suggesting, as with the stories discussed in the

previous section, that they suffer from a combination of Lynch & Kilmartin's (2013) 'emotional void' (p. 7) and Rutz' (2000) and Gilligan's (1995) inability to articulate what the problem actually is, resulting in isolation from the world around them. However, where the stories discussed in the previous section suggested this isolation was simply part of entering adulthood, these two stories link it explicitly with the protagonists' labour: Both Amy's father and Mickey are depicted as incomplete *because* they have given over so much of their lives to working, leaving them with nothing else. Their transformation allows them to leave this labour behind and instead focus on life as a married woman, something both stories represent as far less taxing: Amy's father has 'a huge weight taken off my shoulders' and Mickey discovers that Anna's life is nothing but 'wonderful sensations' (p. 108) as Jim has sex with Anna's body. The existence of female emotional labour, as identified by Gilligan (1995) in the chapter's introduction, is simply ignored, which is what the project will now address.

The representation of male labour as taxing while female labour goes unmentioned is consistent with the reactionary texts and masculinist standpoint mentioned in the introduction; Synott's (2009) characterisation of all males as 'taxed' by their role as breadwinners, leading to men's greater morbidity and suicide, is a perfect fit for Mickey, an alcoholic with an unspecified and potentially fatal medical condition who lacks the time, energy and money to turn his life around. His financial woes are exacerbated further by his ex-wife, who is currently suing him over failed alimony payments, recalling Synott's argument that men the role of men in marriages is to offer 'patriarchal *donation*, not domination', and Farrell's argument that married men are ultimately at the mercy of their wives' "choice" to leave the relationship at any time they wish. This also reproduces wider

Men's Rights Activist concerns about the ostensible "reverse sexism" of the courts; see Chapter 7 for a discussion.

Meanwhile, Amy's father, while depicted as financially successful, is also depicted as having paid an emotional toll as a result of his commitment to succeeding in the business world as a 'hard working man' (p. 35). Before he is even introduced into the narrative, Jeff, Amy's boyfriend, is shown complaining about him, exclaiming 'Your dad freaking hates me! [...] I would love to get along with him too but he hates me no matter what I do or say' (p. 2) and being appalled at the idea of 'a whole weekend with him' (p. 5). Jeff's opinion is shown to be well-founded as, when Amy's father arrives, his first instinct is to complain to Amy that Jeff's low income is 'denying you the type of luxury you deserve' (p. 6) and cease to change the subject. Despite Amy's claim that 'we're fine the way we are' (p. 7), her father is incapable of focusing on anything other than Jeff's lack of wealth, complaining about their 'low conditions' (ibid), telling Amy to 'move on up' (ibid), mocking Jeff's engagement ring as a 'high end capsule toy' (p. 12) and loudly, sarcastically referring to their apartment as 'luxurious' (ibid) while he knows Jeff can hear. Amy's father later reveals how being successful is, however, a burden to him, and that, to a degree, he does envy Amy and Jeff's simpler, less hectic lifestyle: 'If it's not an idiot messing things up in the office then it's usually a clueless moron calling me [...] It's frustrating, is what it is. Only upside to coming here is being able to relax. But you relax all the time' (p. 105).

On the basis of the above, both *Playing the Part* and *Daddy's Prom* represent male labour as a source of extreme stress that diminishes their quality of life, whether they are a blue-collar worker at a failing business, or a successful corporate CEO. The stories'



representation of female labour, however, is vastly different, to the point where the concept of female “labour” is elided entirely.

*Playing the Part's* overt reference to Anna's body following a script, as well as the title's allusion to theatre, recalls not only Butler's performativity, but the sexual script theory of Simon & Gagnon,(1984). Sexual situations, like social interaction in general, 'must operate under the guidance of an operating syntax' (Simon & Gagnon, 1984, p. 53), leading to interpersonal interactions being navigated through the use of “scripts” for which subjects function as 'a partial scriptwriter or adapter shaping the materials of relevant cultural scenarios' (ibid). When applied to sex, this leads to subjects improvising based on culturally conditioned scripts, meaning that, rather than being spontaneous acts of passion, our sexual encounters are always partially 'rehearsed' (p. 54) in accordance with pre-existing cultural scenarios. While *Playing the Part* depicts Anna's body taking over as though this behaviour is innate (as it does with all gendered behaviour), the notion that Micky is able to switch off conscious thought and play the part of a young bride suggests something akin to sexual scripting; *Playing the Part* is to be aware that there is a “correct” way for a bride to behave on her wedding night, and simply has Micky play along with what has already been decided. Furthermore, following the script cannot go wrong, with the only sexual awkwardness arising when Micky asserts control over Anna's body and goes “off script”, hiding in the bathroom. The “natural”-ness of femininity discussed, the chapter will now turn Gilligan's work on caretaking, as both stories represent it in a similar, “natural” way.

What is also common to both transformed protagonists is their adoption of Gilligan's feminine ethic of care, something which is, like a svelte body and a love of lingerie,

represented as coming naturally to female bodies. The representation of this as “natural” also calls to mind the previously discussed work of Ortner (1974) on the belief that women’s bodies are closer to nature than male bodies; this “irrationality” will also be developed further in Chapter 9 . When Mickey gains full control over Anna’s body in *Playing the Part*, his immediate instinct is to ‘get the fuck out of here’ (Sturkwurk & Femur, 2011, p. 75), leaving Jim on what he thought would be his and Anna’s wedding night. However, Mickey finds himself sympathising with Jim’s situation: ‘He looks like a wounded puppy [...] I wish there was something I could do to make him feel better’ (p. 71), ‘Jim’s going to be so devastated when he realizes that the Anna he loves is gone forever. The poor bastard!’ (p. 72). Mickey soon finds himself feeling affectionately towards ‘the big lug’ (p. 80), which then becomes a desire to please him sexually above all else, with Mickey finding fulfilment in providing Jim with sexual release through oral sex: ‘I want to do something for Jim. I want to make him feel every bit as good as he makes me feel’ (p. 92), ‘I’m willing to do whatever it takes [...] If I can take care of Jim’s needs, make him happy, then perhaps he’ll never miss the real Anna’ (p. 113), ‘It’s not like I mind giving Jim a blowjob. Far from it. Making my man moan with pleasure [...] is exciting’ (p. 144). Amy’s father goes through a similar epiphany when it comes to pleasing Jeff in *Daddy’s Prom*. ‘For the first time since being a woman, this felt like that right thing to do [...] I want him to take me and make me his. I want to know what it’s like to be a woman [...] It’s strange. Like a huge weight has been taken off my back’ (Infinity Sign & Christie, 2014, pp. 141 – 144), as though working to please Jeff simply comes naturally to “Barbara”, in stark contrast to the ‘huge weight’ of succeeding in the business world, recalling the above discussion of scripts.

In the same way that the protagonists' transformed bodies denied performativity in favour of a kind of inner feminine essence, their caretaking, too, is represented as nature rather than obligation. They are not 'bound internally and externally by obligations to care without complaint' (Gilligan, 1995, p. 124), but rather desire to perform the role of a caregiver and sexual pleaser: Mickey is motivated by *wanting* to make Jim feel better, with Jim simply standing by passively - 'he won't try and stop me' (Sturkwurk & Femur, 2011, p. 76) - until "Anna" makes a decision, while Amy's father is the one who initiates a relationship with Jeff because it "feels right". In both cases, this decision to leave the male labour force behind for the life of a married woman results in what is unambiguously depicted as an ideal happy ending for all involved. Mickey, as Jim's new wife, looks forward to a life of constant sexual stimulation, feeling 'these wonderful sensations [...] again and again. Wouldn't that be wonderful?' (p. 108), and never having to return to Mickey's 'pathetic life' (p. 76) as a blue-collar worker. Likewise, *Daddy's Prom* explicitly has Amy's father explain that marrying Jeff is 'not the happy ending I imagined. It's even better' (Infinity Sign & Christie 2014, p. 146). The muted voice Gilligan found in women who behaved selflessly, the 'inner feelings of sadness and isolation' (Gilligan, 1995, p. 124) of women who were 'shut up within herself' (ibid) is, like the obligation to care, absent from the story. Gilligan's 'unpaid labour' (p. 122), along with Butler's 'repetition of [patriarchal] logic' (p. 42) are both rendered instead as a kind of female biological imperative to serve male needs, something "natural" and idyllic that provides an escape from the thankless stress of masculine labour. Ironically, it is this masculine labour that is viewed as self-sacrificing, while women's expectation of self-sacrifice is seen as personal fulfilment.

## ESCAPE TO FEMININE SELF-EXPRESSION

This section will build on the previous discussion of transformations which represent masculinity as something highly restrictive that must be constantly self-policed for fear of failing to embody it, while representing femininity as something more intuitive and malleable which allows for a greater range of potential expression. These transformations differ somewhat from those discussed earlier, in that the character is not escaping personal or professional responsibilities in and of themselves, but is rather escaping from the limitations under which he is expected to perform them. To take an example which will feature later on in this section, the independent film *The Hit Girl* (Ward, 2013) tells the story of a male hired assassin, Bill, who finds themselves transformed into a teenage girl, Jessica. Jessica proves able to form emotional connections that Bill could not, something which, combined with Jessica's new reliance on cunning over brute strength, means that Jessica proves to be both a better assassin and a less emotionally inhibited human being than Bill was. There is no talk of Jessica retiring from being an assassin now that they are no longer an adult man, though; this depiction differentiates Jessica from characters discussed so far in this chapter, who have no intention of returning to their original lives as men.

To better organise this analysis, this section is divided into two sub-sections, each covering a specific theme. These themes differ somewhat from the themes discussed previously in this chapter, because the problems faced by the characters are not associated with adult male responsibilities, such as working to support a family. Rather, the problem in these narratives is more broadly that masculinity is perceived as boring, with fewer options for self-expression and personal indulgences. These are "Femininity as 'Fun'", in which male

characters transform from male to female and find that their lives are more enjoyable and less stressful without the need to perform a stoic and aggressive masculinity, and “Femininity as Personal Expression”, in which male characters transform from male to female and then find themselves able to connect with a previously suppressed “feminine side”. In either case, positive aspects of the character’s prior male life, such as their socioeconomic position, occupation, respect, competence and so on are not affected negatively by the transformation, and may, in fact, improve.

The analysis will begin by discussing two separate ways in which femininity is represented as “fun”, firstly with the focus on femininity as a generalised “fun” in the comics *The Assault*, *Spraypaint* and *The Watch*, and secondly a more specific discussion of shopping as “fun” in *The Watch*.

#### ‘Why would I want to switch back to being a bald-headed dork?’: The “Fun” of Hyperfeminine Self-Expression

This section will discuss two self-contained “TG” comics, *Spraypaint* (blackshirtboy, 2011b) and *The Assault* (Sturkwurk & Nimeyal, 2014) as well the ongoing comic *The Watch*. In the examples taken from these comics, “boring” male characters undergo “TG” transformations which allow them a new “fun” means of self-expression through embodying an exaggerated form of femininity, in some cases explicitly associated with consumerism. Post-transformation, these characters are depicted as happier and less inhibited, as though embodying these forms of femininity has allowed them to better enjoy themselves and “have fun”. What is especially notable about these portrayals of femininity

is that they are not represented as a means of pleasing men, but as a source of pleasure and power in and of themselves. This representation of a consumer-driven femininity as something women do “for themselves” is common to postfeminist discourse, is also associated heavily with shopping in *The Watch*, the ubiquity of which receives its own section following this one.

*Spraypaint* is a four page comic, although an alternate version of the final page exists ‘for those who aren’t fans of gigantic breasts’<sup>6</sup>, making for a total page count of five. The comic tells the story of three unnamed young men, two of whom are preparing to go out on a Friday night to celebrate the end of the working week. As the third man pleads ‘[C]an I please come out with you tonight?’ (blackshirtboy, 2011b, p. 1), the other two men each take a can of spray paint and spray it on their bodies, with the areas covered by the paint transforming their bodies from male to female, and their clothes from baggy t-shirts and sneaker to revealing dresses and high heels. In response to the third man complaining ‘You do this every Friday night and never take me’ (p. 3), his two friends, now fully transformed, begin spraying him with eight separate spray paint cans, transforming him into a woman in a rainbow bikini, extremely high heels, and breasts of varying size depending on which version of page four is read. In reference to the new heels (and potentially the new breasts) making it almost impossible to walk, one of the transformed men announces ‘If you can make it to the door, you can come with us’ (p. 4).

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<sup>6</sup> <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/vignettes/spraypaint/#nav-4>

*The Assault* is a 103-page science fiction comedy, telling the story of the aftermath of an alien space craft's unprovoked destruction at the hands of the gung-ho US General Jack Adams. A scientist, Charles Cremer, finds a glowing cube in the ship's wreckage, and takes it back to his house for further study. Charles lives with his wife, Cynthia, who has been openly antagonist towards him ever since one of Charles' experiments caused their son, Tim, to lose his hair. Tim, now an adult, is currently staying with them, along with his fiancé, Natalie. The mood in the household is tense, with Cynthia repeatedly snapping at Charles, calling him an 'asshole' (Sturlwuk & Nimeal, 2014, p. 10) in front of Tim and Natalie.

Over the next few weeks, the alien cube begins to affect the Cremer family both physically and psychologically. Charles' hair turns from grey to black, and Cynthia becomes less aggressive, while Tim's hair grows back entirely. Charles then loses all his facial hair and slowly transforms from male to female, while Cynthia starts to lose weight and appear noticeably younger. Soon, Charles and Cynthia have both become young women with uncontrollable sex drives, resolving their relationship issues. Meanwhile, Natalie's breasts have enlarged and Tim has become both female and nonspecifically 'Asian', much like the character of Mingmei Wu discussed earlier in this chapter. The four characters gradually find themselves adopting highly sexualised feminine behaviours and dress styles, wearing increasingly revealing clothing, giggling, using the word 'like' multiple times per sentence, and seducing, arousing and placating any men they come across. Charles continues research on the cube, and discovers that it is programmed to transform males into females, and to then increase female libido while reducing intelligence.

Another alien space ship then lands and offers to resolve the situation. The four characters ask for their minds to be reverted, but to keep their transformed bodies, which the aliens agree to. The story then skips ahead one year, and it is revealed that the two couples are still together and have ‘returned to our normal lives and jobs’ (p. 100), with Charles having won a Nobel Prize and Tim a Pulitzer. However, they continue to act like ‘ditz[es]’ (p. 99), giggling and discussing the fetish outfits they plan to wear for each other, all of which is preferable to being ‘a bald-headed dork’ (ibid).

The ongoing “TG” comic *The Watch* contains many transformations which conflate masculinity with a limited ability to enjoy oneself, and femininity with the capacity to let one’s hair down and “have fun”. This theme recurred in the narratives discussed previously in this chapter, but was there presented in opposition to adult male responsibilities, while *The Watch* – given that it primarily focuses on characters in their mid-teens – here presents “fun” in opposition to simply being dull. Before addressing the comic’s narratives in relation to scholarship, this chapter will touch briefly on two instances in which *The Watch* refers to male-to-female transformations as ‘fun’ outside of its narrative.

Firstly, as quoted in Chapter 2, *The Watch* explicitly describes its repeated used of sex-change transformations as “fun” and makes a point of distancing itself from the perception that it is in any way sexual. As was also discussed Chapter 4, male-to-female transformation in “TG” media is overwhelmingly more frequent than female-to-male, and *The Watch* is no exception, with only three examples of female-to-male transformation occurring between 2002 and 2015. On the basis of this, when *The Watch* calls sex-change transformations ‘fun and interesting’, it is specifically calling *male-to-female transformations*



'fun'. The second instance of *The Watch* representing femininity as "fun" outside of its narrative occurs in two self-contained scenes occurring in what the *story What's My Age Again?* refers to as 'filler space' (Onymous & Ericson, 2003g, p. 14). Pages 14 and 15 of *What's My Age Again?* both feature only three strips of panels rather than four, with the bottom quarter of the page being a black space where the characters of Robin and Jason interact with each other outside of the comic's current narrative. In the first filler space, Jason has transformed from male to female, and is wearing a more revealing version of Jason's male clothing, which exposes Jason's cleavage and midriff. When Robin asks Jason 'Why are you a girl?' (p. 14), Jason replies '[T]his is filler space. Might as well have some non-continuity fun' (ibid). In the filler space of the second page, Robin is now also female, and likewise wearing a feminine version of Robin's original male outfit which reveals even more cleavage and stomach than what Jason is wearing. 'You're right', says Robin, 'Non-continuity fun is cool' (p. 15), to which Jason simply replies 'Told ya' (ibid). While brief and existing outside of the comic's narrative, this short sequence explicitly links the performance of femininity, in particular the display of the female body's secondary sexual characteristics, with "fun", as do the portrayals in *Spraypaint* and *The Assault*.

The above representations of women embodying an exaggerated and highly sexualised form of femininity "for themselves" rather than men demonstrates the influence of postfeminist discourses on these "TG" narratives. Notably, while this "raunch culture" discourse elides men – this is, as will be demonstrated later, one of the critiques of it – the "TG" narratives discussed above are told from a masculinist standpoint. For this reason, the analysis of these narratives will begin with work on how men perceive young women's performance of femininity, then move on to a discussion of postfeminist engagements with

femininity. The discussion of the masculinist standpoint will begin with Frosh's "Boys Talking About Girls", published as part of *Young Masculinities* (Frosh, Phoenix & Patman, 2001), a study of young male attitudes towards young women. As expected in light of the literature on masculinity discussed in Chapter 3, boys viewed girls relationally as "not boys", with girls seen as displaying interests and behaviours that were the opposite those displayed by boys. Most pertinent to "TG" media, the boys interviewed admitted having no real idea what girls did on their own, viewing them from a distance: 'We see them all there in a crowd talking and we look at them and they're gone' (Frosh, Phoenix & Patman, 2001, p. 100). This led to the assumption among boys that girls aren't doing anything of substance, with Frosh noting the frequency with which boys 'prefaced their account of girls' activities with the word "just" (ibid), characterising girls' actions as 'having no purpose and therefore as pointless [...] meaningless and second rate' (ibid). It should be noted that, while Frosh's young male subjects were emphatic that girls were *not* "fun", their definition of "fun" was heavily gendered, and involved 'risk-taking, not thinking about the consequences of their actions, not thinking seriously about the future and misbehaving' (p. 104). Girls' leisure activities were still viewed as "just" inane, pointless and inconsequential in comparison to boys. As with the discussion of emotional and interpersonal labour earlier in this chapter, the gendered nature of this labour obscures that it *is* labour. In the "TG" comics discussed in this section, femininity is represented as "fun" precisely because it *is* effortless; something acquired through instant "TG" transformations rather than labour. This is especially blatant in *Spraypaint*, in which femininity is literally applied to the body using aerosol cans, and the character without access to the cans has no means of embodying it, which leaves him depressed and reduces him to pleading with the others.

It is worth noting that, in all three cases, the “TG” comics discussed highlight that the characters are not simply embodying femininity, but an exaggerated and sexualised form of femininity consistent with postfeminist “do-me feminism”, described by Genz & Brabon (2009/2018) as ‘a highly sexualised version of power feminism [...] that sees sexual freedom as the key to female independence and emancipation’ (Genz & Brabon, 2009/2018 p. 139). The transformed characters in *Spraypaint* all wear incredibly revealing clothing, with individual panels dedicated to highlighting their legs, breasts, painted fingernails and extremely high heels; the “punch line” on the final page also hinges on understanding that the character’s new combination of very large breasts and high heels are so exaggerated that it will be hard to stand up straight. *The Assault* openly acknowledges that they are “ditzes” who cannot stop thinking about sex, and *The Watch* has the transformed Robin and Jason wear far more revealing versions of the outfits they otherwise wear when female. In all cases, this is represented as a conscious choice made by women for their own benefit and pleasure, with male desires and patriarchal coercion playing no role in these choices (even when these displays are put on for men in *The Assault*, the women are manipulating hapless men, not flattering them). Returning to Genz & Brabon’s survey of postfeminist discourses, this sexualised “do-me feminism” works by focusing on the way that women *choose* to perform femininity: ‘The do-me feminist [...] expresses her individual agency not by politicising her relationships and her status as a sexual object but primarily through the rearticulation of her feminine/sexual identity’ (Genz & Brabon, 2009/2018 p. 141). In this strand of postfeminism, ‘sexuality/femininity [...] comes to be associated with [...] emancipation and self-determination, rather than patriarchal oppression and subjugation’ (p. 142). This will now be developed in greater detail with reference to Rosalind Gill’s (2003)

work on the rise of what she calls “Sexual Subjectification” among young women in postfeminism.

Writing in *Feminist Media Studies*, Gill notes that previous generations of women ‘were struggling and fighting *not* to be portrayed in [an] objectified manner [...] reduced to the size of their breasts [and] consumed only as sexual objects’ (Gill, 2003 p. 101), yet the postfeminism has seen a ‘deliberate *re-sexualisation* and *re-commodification* of women’s bodies’ (ibid, emphasis in original). This is not simply a return to earlier attitudes; ‘I want to suggest that what we are seeing is not just a harking back to a safe, bygone or mythic age [...] but rather the construction of a *new femininity* [...] organised around sexual confidence and autonomy’ (p. 103, emphasis in original). Gill terms this “Sexual Subjectification”, arguing that what differentiates postfeminist representations of sexualised women is that ‘they do not (as in the past) depict women as passive objects but as knowing, active, and desiring sexual subjects [...] a shift from sexual objectification to sexual subjectification’ (ibid). Under sexual subjectification, women are sold a new ideal, ‘the sexually autonomous heterosexual young woman who plays with her sexual power’ constructed around ‘the notion that women are *pleasing themselves* and [...] endowed with agency so that they can actively choose to objectify themselves [...] who can somehow choose to “use beauty” to make themselves feel good’ (p. 104, emphasis in original). Recalling the discussion of Bartky in Chapter 7, this creates in woman a ‘*self-policing narcissistic gaze* [...] in which the objectifying male gaze is internalised’ (p. 104, emphasis in original), which ‘offers women the promise of power by becoming an object of desire [...] In this way, sexual objectification can be presented not as something done to women [...] but as the freely chosen wish of active, confident, assertive female subjects’ (ibid). Gill further develops this in a 2011 article,

arguing for the concept of “sexual entrepreneurship”, in which the modern female subject is ‘incited to be compulsorily sexy and always “up for it” [...] interpellated through discourses in which sex and work that requires constant labour and reskilling [...] Beauty, desirability and sexual performance(s) constitute her ongoing projects’ (Gill & Harvey, 2011 p. 56), represented as forms of empowerment through personal choice.

It is this postfeminist representation of a highly sexualised femininity as a source of power in and of itself that is relevant to these “TG” media narratives. In the discussion of emphasised femininity in Chapter 7, for example, the transformed characters also adopted an exaggerated form of femininity, but this was represented as functioning within a hierarchy in which placating men was advantageous. In the three “TG” narratives discussed in this section, however, only *The Assault* features male characters outside of the transformed protagonists, and their role is minor, with most of the narrative focusing on the protagonists’ domestic lives. *Spraypaint* features no men outside the transformed protagonists, as do the “non-continuity fun” panels in *The Watch*. Even outside of Connell’s hegemonic model, academic work on “hyperfemininity”, defined by Muren & Byrne (1991) as ‘exaggerated adherence to a stereotypic feminine gender role’ (Muren & Byrne, 1991 p. 480), notes that finding and maintaining a heterosexual relationship is key (Muren & Byrne 1991; McKelvie & Gold, 1994). In contrast, the characters in these “TG” narratives are either single or in relationships with other women.

Given the depiction of multiple female same-sex relationships in *The Assault*, it is worth looking at the way in which postfeminism has reconfigured hyperfemininity to involve female-female sexuality as titillation for a male audience. This has been addressed by Yost &

McCarthy (2012) in “Girls Gone Wild? Heterosexual Women’s Same-Sex Encounters at College Parties” and Diamond (2005) in “I’m Straight, but I Kissed a Girl: The Trouble with American Media Representations of Female-Female Sexuality”. Diamond notes an ‘upsurge of openly lesbian (and less often, bisexual) characters and relationships on American films and television shows’ (Diamond, 2005, p. 104), including *But I’m A Cheerleader*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Friends*, and *Queer as Folk*, but that this was quickly supplanted by a new concept called “heteroflexibility” in which ‘presumably heterosexual women’ (ibid) experiment briefly with female-female sexual encounters ‘in a manner designed to specifically attract and titillate young male viewers’ (p. 105). Such “heteroflexible” representations ‘take pains to clarify that the participants are *not*, in fact, lesbians [...] such images implicitly convey that the most desirable and acceptable form of female-female sexuality is that which pleases *and* plays to the heterosexual male gaze’ (ibid). Susan Douglas’s *The Rise of Enlightened Sexism* (2010) agrees, noting that this “lesbian chic” approach quickly became ‘a fashionable “add-on” to otherwise conventional sexuality’ (Douglas, 2010 p. 290), erasing serious representation of lesbian and bisexual women in the mass media.

Such ideas can be applied to the depiction of the couples in *The Assault*, at least in part. Reading the female-female couples as “heteroflexible” is technically inaccurate, as the characters do not return to heterosexual relationships after a brief, titillating fling, electing to remain as female-female couples. However, this is complicated by the fact that both couples were *originally* heterosexual prior to their “TG” transformations, do very little beyond try on clothing and grope each other, and use their bodies to seduce and manipulate heterosexual men, making *The Assault* closer to the kind of titillating portrayals

being critiqued by Diamond. Yost & McCarthy's (2012) study builds on Diamond's work by studying the subjective experiences of young heterosexual women who have kissed and danced sensually with each other at parties, with the majority of women stating that they did this 'to get attention from men' (Yost & McCarthy, 2012, p. 8), suggesting that 'the behaviour may not reflect their own desire, but instead reflects the desire to do something that is perceived as attractive to male observers' (ibid), with 'nearly every woman' (p. 13) reporting being pressured by male peers. Given their masculinist standpoint, as with *Spraypaint* and *The Watch*, however, men do not pressure the women in *The Assault* – they simply choose to behave in a sexualised way regardless of the situation.

A return to the "sexual subjectification" arguments outlined above perhaps offers an explanation of these narratives' portrayal of female sexuality. Understood entirely from a masculinist point of view, the postfeminist pressure on women to assert themselves by becoming "sexually subjectified" through their dress, behaviour and "heteroflexibility" is elided, as is the awareness that such behaviour ultimately serves the interests of men by disciplining women to self-police. Instead, women are represented as sanctioned to enjoy their sexuality in a way that men are not, "subjectifying" themselves for their own benefit, pleasure and "fun". Not only are the pressure and labour involved ignored, so are the negative impacts. It is especially notable that *The Assault* depicts its scientist characters as still commanding respect despite their exaggerated "bimbo" behaviour, given that the previously cited studies of hyperfemininity noted the 'interpersonal and personal costs for adopting such attitudes/behavior' (Matschiner & Murnen, 1999, p. 639), specifically that hyperfeminine women are 'judged as less competent and knowledgeable' (ibid) and are 'seen as legitimate targets of male sexual aggression against women' (ibid). Hyperfeminine

behaviour is also strongly correlated with ‘symptoms of [...] social and self-alienation [...] general dysphoria and low self-esteem’ (p. 227), a description which seems to best describe male, rather than female, “TG” media characters.

#### ‘Why do we need to be girls to go the mall?’: Shopping While Female as “Fun”

Within *The Watch*’s narrative, “fun” is repeatedly and explicitly associated with young women’s performance of femininity. This project has previously covered the characters of Aimee, Lily and Mingmei, who began as put-upon males working thankless jobs before being transformed into young women and discovering that it made for a less stressful and more rewarding experience. These stories were covered in greater depth in separate sections, as there was more going on to these specific transformations than the broad concept of “fun” being discussed here. Rather, in the following transformations, “fun” is more of a recurring motif than something which drives the narrative, and is explicitly associated with shopping. This association between femininity, fun and consumerism is a common thread running through postfeminist discourse, and will serve as the framework for analysing these narratives.

*The Watch* firstly associates “fun” with young women going clothes shopping at malls, most explicitly in the opening of the story *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. Anne, Robin and Jason begin the story by leaving Anne’s house for the local mall, with Anne having already transformed Jason from male to female just prior to leaving. The narrative then jumps ahead to the trio already having been shopping for some time, and it is revealed that Robin has also been transformed from male to female in the interim. When Robin asks Anne



'Why do we need to be girls to go the mall?' (Onymous & Ericson, 2006c, p.7, emphasis in original), her immediately reply is 'You don't! But even [Jason] says it's way more fun!' (ibid). While this is the most explicit case, the association is repeatedly invoked elsewhere in *The Watch*, particularly around Jason and his frequent male-to-female transformations. Jason asks Anne to transform him from male to female so that the pair can 'hit the stores' (Onymous & Ericson, 2006a, p. 7) together and, while male, carries a notebook around in which he writes down stores to visit and outfits to try on the next time he is transformed (Onymous & Ericson, 2003f, p. 5). Anne is aware of this, and refuses to transform Jason at a critical moment in case he goes window shopping (Onymous & Ericson, 2005c, p. 23). Jason also spends an entire page of the comic shopping for dresses in preparation for a night out (Onymous & Ericson, 2005a, p. 9).

Outside of Jason transforming from male to female to enjoy the mall, female characters who have not been transformed from male ones also repeatedly demonstrate an interest. During the climax of *Angelique the Defective Djinn*, a poorly-worded wish results in Anne becoming 'bimbofied' (Onymous & Ericson, 2003a, p. 17), and her first act is to announce 'We should totally go to the mall!' (ibid). When Jenny, a three year old girl, finds herself suddenly aged up to an adult body, she reacts by saying 'all I can think about is hitting the mall for some shopping' (Onymous & Ericson, 2006d, p. 12). The story *Split Screen* is set in the mall, and only depicts young women as shopping there (Onymous & Ericson, 2003f, p. 3), with the male characters there to play video games at the arcade (p. 11) or because they are employees (p. 6). While both male and female patrons of the mall are depicted in the later story *Date Night... Of Doom!*, the depiction of the two lead characters is still gendered, with the male Robin at the mall to take karate classes (Onymous

& Ericson, 2005a, p.5), while Jason has been transformed from male to female and is there to shop (p. 9) and manipulate male patrons for fun (p. 11).

The postfeminist association between consumerism, femininity and fun will be the focus of this analysis, beginning with an overview of the gendered nature of consumerism. As Zukin & Maguire (2004) note, participation in consumerism is 'viewed as both amoral and gendered' (Zukin & Maguire, 2004, p. 175), with the purchase of goods linked to social status and the purchasing done mostly by women. The specifically gendered nature of shopping expressed in *The Watch* arose from the ways in which modern malls and department stores functioned as a female gathering place 'by providing a reason — shopping — for women to appear unescorted in public, as well as arranging safe spaces like rest rooms and tea rooms where women could gather or sit alone [...] made it possible for women to leave the domestic space of the home and lay claim to the center of the city' (p. 177). Another overview of consumerism is provided by Catherine Coleman (2012), who describes how the consumer is positioned as 'passive and feminine' (Coleman, 2012, p. 7), in contrast to the producer, who is active and masculine. Fraser's *Fortunes of Feminism* (2013) expands on this, noting the 'internal relation between being a man and being a provider' (Fraser, 2013, p. 34), contrasted with the feminine consumer as 'the worker's companion' (p. 35). Fraser continues, 'the sexual division of domestic labor assigns women the [...] unpaid and unrecognized work [...] of purchasing and preparing goods and services for domestic consumption' (ibid), which has influenced the way in which consumption is viewed, and how advertisements function: 'advertising has nearly always interpellated its subject, the consumer, as feminine [...] it has elaborated an entire phantasmatics of desire premised on the femininity of the subject of consumption' (ibid).

On the subject of how the feminine consumer is constructed, Coleman (2012) notes that 'women are treated as emotional consumers [...] who lack agency' (ibid) and are 'labelled as vulnerable [...] submissive' (Coleman, 2012, p. 8), easily manipulated into making purchases by the advertising industry. Hollows (2000) likewise notes that 'consumption can be derided by aligning it with "feminine" qualities, and femininity can be derided by aligning it with consumption' (Hollows, 2000, p. 115). This explains both the gendered aspects of the shopping mall as a location, and is also suggestive of the "fun" aspect; as this chapter is dedicated to "TG" narratives in which masculinity is seen as restrictive and constraining, the feminine role of an impulsive, weak, vulnerable and submissive consumer who impulsively purchases whatever takes her fancy functions well as an inversion. However, it is worth noting that, as noted in the introduction to the section, postfeminist discourse has repositioned women's consumption, specifically the consumption of femininity, as an empowering act in and of itself. The remainder of this section's analysis will deal directly with the development of this discourse under postfeminism.

As Faludi (1991/2006) notes in *Backlash*, the antifeminist culture of the 1980's and early 90's 'stifled women's political speech and then redirected self-expression to the shopping mall. The passive consumer was reissued as an ersatz feminist, exercising her "right" to buy products, making her own "choices" at the checkout counter' (Faludi, 1991/2006, p. 85). Moving into the 2000's, Genz & Brabon's (2009/2018) survey of postfeminist discourses notes a shift toward 'redefin[ing] the meanings of and objects related to femininity' (Genz & Brabon, 2009/2018 p. 121), through a discourse in which women are encouraged to 'gain control [of femininity] by using their insider position in

consumer culture [...] emphasising that [...] patriarchal connotations of girlishness can be interrupted by alternative modes of production/consumption' (ibid). This transfigures consumerism into empowerment, producing a discourse in which 'women earn the "right" to consume sexualised commodities as a means to express their agency' (p. 123) in which 'emancipation and agency are often directly tied to consumer culture and the ability to purchase [...] products and services frequently associated with femininity / sexuality' (ibid). Eisenstein's *Feminism Seduced* (2009) concurs, noting that mainstream feminism in the 2000's was informed by 'modern ideas of female empowerment and all of the accompanying baggage of consumerism [and] individualism' (Eisenstein, 2009, p. 221). This redefinition of women's empowerment as the ability to "choose" to sexualise oneself is reminiscent of the "sexual subjectification" theorised by Gill (2003) and discussed earlier this chapter. Gill's work is explicitly cited by Abel (2012) in her article on how contemporary advertising uses what she terms "the knowing wink" to sell to consumers. When advertisements use "the knowing wink", they 'recirculate old gender stereotypes' (Abel, 2012 p. 401) in a self-aware way which gives the impression of a 'wryly speculative commentary on what we have seen' (ibid), suggesting that 'we are not sexist anymore, and we can all laugh at these old stereotypes' (ibid); as with "sexual subjectification", these advertisements suggest that indulging in these sexual stereotypes is not problematic or harmful provided we are aware that it is a conscious choice. This recalls the postfeminist discourses of empowerment discussed in Chapters 3 and 6, as well as Bartky (1990) and Jeffreys' critique of the fashion and beauty industries being presented as sites of women's empowerment in Chapter 7. Notably, there is no suggestion that women cease to define themselves through consumption; they are instead encouraged to continue consuming, but are told this is an active display of personal agency.

Also applicable is the postfeminist shift towards the creation of a masculine consumer subject. Returning to Fraser, she notes that the difficulty lay in 'find[ing a] means of positioning a male consumer that did not feminize, emasculate, or sissify him' (Fraser, 2013 p. 35), given the aforementioned association between femininity and consumerism. Ostberg (2012) observes in "Masculinity and Fashion" that the early 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen male consumers increasingly invited 'to partake in the carnival of consumption in ways previously reserved predominately for female consumers' (Ostberg, 2012, p. 262), citing the TV show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and the book *The Metrosexual Guide to Style*. Ostberg notes that, while there do exist 'masculine consumer roles that focus on rationality and usability' (p. 264), contemporary male consumers find themselves positioned somewhere in between consuming for utilitarian reasons and consuming for aesthetics; the challenge is to construct an 'appropriately suave male consumer identity' (ibid). Ostberg cites Tuncay (2005), who argues that contemporary male consumers are trapped in two contradictions: needing to express individuality through consumer choices while still appearing masculine, and needing to care about their appearance while not caring too much and thus running the risk of appearing homosexual. The young male subjects of Frosh's "Boys Talking About Girls", discussed in the previous section, demonstrate this confusion; Frosh's boys openly dismiss girls for being obsessed with fashion and appearances, but simultaneously 'spoke, with much enthusiasm and knowledge, about various designer labels they wore' (Frosh, 2012 p. 102). Frosh notes that the boys navigated this contradiction by represented themselves as actively involved in the creation of a style for themselves, 'redefining their interest in clothes almost as functional' (ibid), in contrast to

the representation of female consumers as passive, impulsive and easily manipulated, as discussed earlier in this section.

Rinaldo (2007), also cited by Ostberg, theorises these contradictions as occurring either side of a small “safe zone” of acceptable male consumer behaviour. As Ostberg explains, ‘If a man shows no care of self, he will suffer negative social consequences, and if a man is too careful with his appearance, he will be viewed as effeminate’ (Ostberg, 2012, p. 264). The “metrosexual” of the mid-2000’s was an attempt to create a masculine consumer identity which existed within Rinaldo’s “safe zone”. Ostberg, however, cautions against viewing this as any substantial challenge to masculinity, instead understanding it as ‘coproductions of a media and marketing system in which there is constant pressure to define new target groups in order to sell both advertising space and new products’ (ibid).

Reading *The Watch*’s portrayal of shopping through this framework of postfeminist consumerism helps explain the appeal of these “TG” transformations as a Restrained to Free Social Inversion narrative. As the literature demonstrates, men must navigate a confused and contradictory consumer identity in which advertisers, seeking new markets, attempt to persuade them to buy into forms of consumerism traditionally associated with femininity, but in such a way that their masculinity is not threatened. While some forms of successful, secure masculinity may be able to traverse the aforementioned “safe zone” without their masculinity or heterosexuality being called in question – “metrosexual” soccer player David Beckham being a frequently cited example (Simpson, 2002) – this is not true of the central cast of *The Watch*, whose “geek” masculinity is already

tenuous. For the boys of *The Watch* to experiment with self-expression through fashion and consumerism is too risky.

It is notable that while Robin is not depicted as enjoying clothes shopping as a girl, and transforms only begrudgingly in order to fit in with Anne and Jason on their excursions to buy clothing, Jason's relationship to the mall and consumerism is more complex, and better embodies the contradictions of postfeminist consumerism discussed above. While Jason goes shopping for outfits to wear when he becomes Sonja, he is not depicted as a passive or impulsive consumer, but rather as calculating and discerning, methodically listing potential outfits on a notepad he carries around with him. Even in the extended sequence of Jason trying on dresses as Sonja, their demeanour is detached and casual as they explain their plans for the evening to Robin, searching for a dress that is not 'too risqué [...] too conservative [...] too flowery' (Onymous & Ericson, 2005a, p. 9), eventually settling on a dress that reveals a large amount of Sonja's cleavage 'to prove a point [...] I can act as I want to act and can still be in control of the situation' (p. 21).

This is reminiscent of the way in which "appropriate" male consumerism is framed in the above literature, particularly Ostberg and Frosh, and also with the postfeminist representation of female consumers as emancipated subjects who are *choosing* to purchase feminine commodities as "insiders", rather than being trapped by them. Despite buying dresses for his female alter ego, Jason's behaviour is not impulsive, and he takes an active role in constructing the look of Sonja for reasons of personal gain; it is not that Jason is ruled by an irrational feminine desire for pretty clothing, but that displaying a sexualised femininity through clothing is both a means by which men can be manipulated and a means

for Jason to gain personal pleasure through glamour photography of the performance itself. “TG” transformation allows Jason to enjoy what *The Watch* represents as the benefits of female fashion – experimentation with aesthetic styles, control over how chaste or sexual you wish to appear, and pride and pleasure in your appearance – without the associated negativity or risks. Jason’s masculinity is not secure enough for him to experiment with his appearance without being viewed as effeminate or homosexual, and by still maintaining his detached, restrained mindset while female, he also avoids the negative stereotypes associated with female consumers and instead takes on role of a knowing empowered postfeminist female consumer.

Interestingly, *The Watch* also represents these negative stereotypes as a kind of Restrained to Free-esque escape for characters who are *already* female, with Anne’s transformation into a “bimbo” version of herself accompanied by a desire to go impulse shopping, and Jenny’s first action as an independent adult woman is to be overcome with thoughts of visiting the mall; something she displayed no interest in as a child. Anne’s transformation is suggestive of, among other “bimbo” stereotypes discussed in the previous section, the construction of the female consumer as impulsive and easily manipulated, purchasing whatever is dangled in front of her. This is not the kind of Social Inversion the project is interested in, however, as Anne is not depicted as restrained from shopping prior to becoming a bimbo – she does, as discussed earlier in this section, regularly visit the mall, and insists that Robin become a girl so that they can buy clothing together – but it is still a contrast to her usual studious, level-headed self, and she is depicted as enjoying it. Taken in light of the earlier discussion of Jason’s portrayal, *The Watch* appears to be representing a world in which women have the option to indulge in impulsive consumption without



threatening their femininity, but men – even in the forms of women – cannot do so without undermining their masculinity. The solution, embodied by Jason, is to transform but remain in control, allowing access to a broader means of self-expression while also avoiding the negative stereotypes associated with the impulsiveness of female consumers.

‘All I remember about being a man was that I was selfish and self-centred. Now, all I feel is love’: Escaping Masculinity in Favour of Emotional Expression

This section will depart from “TG” comics and instead discuss two “TG” feature films. These films were created by the “TG” community and released professionally on both DVD and online streaming services. These are *The Hit Girl* (Ward, 2014) and *Paradox Alice* (Dapkewicz, 2013). While *The Hit Girl* is a contemporary action comedy and *Paradox Alice* is a science fiction film set in the far future, both feature a male protagonist who successfully embodies hegemonic masculinity but has, as a result of his constant performance of hegemonic masculinity, stunted his ability to express “feminine” emotions and form emotional bonds with others. Both protagonists are transformed from male to female and, after adjusting, find themselves expressing emotions and forming emotional bonds with other people in way that they could not while male. Furthermore, in both cases the protagonist’s female body is initially depicted as a source of vulnerability, particularly to sexual exploitation, but is then revealed to be a strength, allowing the protagonist to overcome adversity without becoming male again.

The protagonist of *The Hit Girl* is Bill, a physically large, middle-aged man working as a hired assassin. While Bill projects an aura of dry, detached macho menace, carrying an

arsenal of automatic weapons around, drinking heavily and patronising strip clubs, it is revealed early on in *The Hit Girl* that this is pure affectation, and that Bill is aware of this: Prior to shooting his most recent target, Bill attempts to think of a Schwarzenegger or Stallone-esque one-liner, but fumbles, and then spends the drive back irritated with himself as he starts thinking of lines he could have said. A loner with no girlfriend, Bill is only depicted as having any kind of connection with one other person, his niece Suzy, whom he bonds with over their mutual love of science fiction and horror films. Suzie, who is without a father figure after her parents' divorce, opens up to him about the problems she is having at high school, Bill sighs that he 'wishes' he had the problems of a teenage girl. When Bill wakes up the next morning, Bill's wish has been granted, and Bill has become a teenage girl.

Initially, Bill's behaviour does not change, with the disconnection between a hegemonically masculine form of expression and the body of a teenage girl causing confusion in onlookers, as Bill smokes cigars, drinks whisky, handles weapons, physically threatens people and flirts with adult women. When Suzie attempts to pass Bill off as a friend of hers, however, Bill is gradually forced to act in a manner consistent with a teenage girl, attending slumber parties, auditioning for a high school musical, applying cosmetics and wearing clothing intended for teenage girls. When Bill realises that their new body is incapable of functioning as a hitman due to its small stature and lack of physical strength, Bill breaks down and begins to cry in front of Suzie, exclaiming that 'I didn't cry when I got shot in South America. I didn't cry when I got tortured in Mogadishu', but Suzie reassures Bill that crying is okay. The bond between the pair grows closer, with Suzie supporting Bill's emotional expression, and Bill providing the unpopular Suzie with a best friend.

Bill, Suzie and the girls at Suzie's high school eventually become the target of a sex trafficking ring that kidnaps underage girls, with Suzie herself ultimately being kidnapped. Bill, realising that Suzie has to be rescued as soon as possible, becomes a "hit girl", incorporating Bill's prior experience in assassination with the behaviours learned as a result of becoming a teenage girl. Wearing high heels, heavy makeup and what is explicitly described as a 'Catholic schoolgirl' uniform, Bill is able to infiltrate the compound where Suzie is held, seducing the guards by pole dancing before gunning them down and escaping with Suzie. That night, Suzie calls Bill 'the drunken, psychotic sister I always dreamed of' and announces 'we're going to have so much fun when school starts'.

A similar character arc is present in the feature film *Paradox Alice*, although its depiction is more extreme and explicit, given *Paradox Alice's* bleaker and less comedic tone. *Paradox Alice's* protagonist, Alex Foxe, is the commander of a dangerous and desperate mission to the moons of Jupiter in order to retrieve unpolluted water that can be used to save the Earth. Joining Foxe on the mission are Gray, the space ship's captain, O'Byrne, a lieutenant, and Spencer, a doctor, and the only female member of the crew.

From the film's beginning, Foxe is depicted as a hegemonically masculine "alpha male", leading him to clash with the other members of the crew, particularly Spencer. Prior to their return flight to Earth, Foxe is shown interviewing himself in a mirror, calling the (imagined) reporter 'Missy', and suggesting that, since he saved the Earth, she can thank him 'personally' during 'a long weekend in Vegas'. As the crew toast their meal that night, Foxe can only think of toasting to the money they'll receive upon the mission's completion, which is contrasted to the other crewmembers toasting to God, their families, and the crew

as a whole. Foxe then takes the younger, more naïve O'Byrne aside and explains to him that women 'sniff out' rich men, and once O'Byrne has money, he'll be able to 'reel them in'. This is followed by another scene which contrasts Foxe with the rest of the crew; while Gray, O'Byrne and Spencer watch recorded messages from their friends and family before bed, Foxe puts on a fitness video in order to leer at the female instructor.

As the ship returns to Earth, however, it is struck by asteroids, and Spencer is killed while Foxe tries to save her. The surviving crew then discover that the asteroids are actually the remains of Earth, which has been destroyed in their absence, leaving the three males as the only human beings alive in the universe, as well as dooming the species, as the three males cannot reproduce. Several days later, Foxe spontaneously collapses and his body transforms from male to female, with its age also reverting from thirty-six to twenty-one. Foxe is initially horrified by being in a body that is physically weaker than before, with Foxe no longer able to operate the heavy machinery on board the ship without assistance from male crew members. O'Byrne begins to make implied sexual threats towards Foxe, believing the transformation to be a miracle from God that will allow them to continue the species, leading Foxe to rely on Gray for protection.

Foxe comes to terms with their 'helpless, 'frail' new body after trying on some of Spencer's clothing, and Foxe realises that they can manipulate the two male crewmembers, particularly O'Byrne, by dressing in revealing clothing and behaving flirtatiously, swaying their hips and suggestively fellating a banana. When Gray apologises for leering at Foxe's buttocks, Foxe insists that Foxe 'doesn't blame' Gray, and that Foxe admires Gray's 'big heart' and 'protective streak'. Fox becomes concerned that their more sexualised behaviour

is happening unconsciously because 'whatever changed me on the outside is changing me on the inside'. The contest between O'Byrne and Gray over Foxe escalates, with O'Byrne ultimately murdering Gray and raping Foxe. Foxe is then able to gain the upper hand over O'Byrne, with O'Byrne sneering that Foxe doesn't 'have the balls' to kill him. Foxe ultimately does, proudly announcing 'I don't need them'. Pregnant with O'Byrne's children, Foxe endeavours to raise them as a means of starting the human race again, ending the film with a monologue contrasting femininity with masculinity: 'I love being a woman. All I remember about being a man was that I was selfish and self-centred. Now, all I feel is love. It's not something you can explain. It's something you feel'. It is this critique of masculinity which will first be discussed.

Both the protagonist of *The Hit Girl* and *Paradox Alice* is initially a man who embodies, or at least attempts to embody, a hegemonic form of masculinity. Foxe from *Paradox Alice* is the most overt example, being a muscular, sexually aggressive celebrity astronaut in his physical prime, playing the heroic role of the human race's saviour and planning to use his social status to have sex with as many women as possible. Bill from *The Hit Girl* is less clear-cut, as he is past his prime, overweight and finds himself messing up his attempts at clever one-liners, making him somewhat inept as the action hero he wishes to be; however, he is still a tough, hard drinking assassin who successfully works alone and does not display weakness in front of others. This leads to a similar set of problems to those identified by the literature at the beginning of this chapter, and in Chapter 3.

Both men's commitment to self-reliance and emotional restraint having led to a lack of emotional support and crippled empathy is foregrounded. Foxe may have crowds of

adoring women waiting for him to return, but he is also the only member of the crew without a significant individual to be attached to, exemplified by the scene in which the other crew members receive messages from their family and friends on Earth while Foxe leers at video of a woman he has never met. He is also described by his later, female self as 'selfish', contrasted with the 'love' associated with femininity. Bill's status as a loner is also underlined repeatedly in *The Hit Girl*, as he has no friends, no romantic relationships, must keep a low profile due to his profession, interacts with other men solely through violence or financial transactions, and has no emotional connections to anyone other than his niece. This is reminiscent of the representation of male isolation and loneliness discussed earlier in this chapter with reference to Carol Gilligan (1995); however, where the characters from *those* narratives embodied subordinated forms of masculinity which led to stress and misery, Foxe and Bill's more successful embodiments are enough to leave them satisfied with life, and understand the limitations of masculinity only in hindsight. Bill learns to cry and to bond with their niece, embracing vulnerability in a way their male self could not, while Foxe's new role is that of a new mother with children to raise, further contrasting with their previous self's lack of empathy and personal connections. What is also notable is that both characters manage to *retain* what was positive about their earlier male selves after transforming; Bill becomes "the hit girl", taking out a gang of professional killers just as efficiently in the body of a fourteen year old girl, and the female Foxe shoots dead their attacker and successfully assumes command of the space ship again. Much like "fun" narratives discussed earlier in this section, here femininity is functioning as a kind of "add-on" to an already existing masculine competence.

This depiction of the transformed characters as lethal and competent as well as feminine is suggestive of the rise of female action stars in mainstream entertainment at the turn of the century; something roughly contemporaneous with the birth of early “TG” media. As detailed in the anthology *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture*, there was an ‘explosion of tough women in [...] films, television shows, comic books, and video games’ (Inness, 2004, p. 1) beginning in the late 1990’s through to the early 2000’s. Contemporary television produced ‘numerous shows, including *La Femme Nikita*, *Xena: Warrior Princess*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Alias* and *Dark Angel*’ (p. 2), while the cinema provided ‘*Tank Girl*, *Girlfight* and *Barb Wire*’ (ibid) and video games featured, along with the famous Lara Croft, the tough female protagonists of ‘*Parasite Eve*, *Resident Evil*, *Bloodrayne* and *Tekken III*’ (ibid). While Inness notes that tough women were also a feature of 1970’s popular culture, citing Pam Grier, *Charlie’s Angels* and *The Bionic Woman*, the turn of the century produced ‘A whole new tough aesthetic [...] in which it is praiseworthy for [women] to be more muscular and aggressive than in the past’ (p. 5).

Herbst (2004) offers an in-depth reading of *Tomb Raider*’s then-ubiquitous heroine, the gun-toting archaeologist Lara Croft. What is key to Croft’s appeal, argues Herbst, is that ‘She adopts male forms of behaviour but is unmistakably female and highly eroticized (Herbst, 2004, p. 22). With ‘a body exuding hypersexuality, she looks like a pin-up girl par excellence’ (p. 26), yet is also a one-woman army trained in the use of dozens of firearms, a combination which ‘reflects masculine desires [...] designed and implemented by men in their teens and twenties’ (pp. 26 – 27). For this reason, Herbst is cautious about proclaiming Croft as an empowering figure for women, as ‘she is born out of a male fantasy and clearly caters to male desires [...] Women are supposed to ignore that the image of Lara was

created neither by them or for them' (p. 28). Brown, writing in the same anthology, also notes the contradictory nature of the contemporary "action chick", looking at the archetype more broadly and finding it a 'difficult character to interpret [...] she represents a potentially transgressive figure [but] she runs the risk of [...] being nothing more than sexist window-dressing for predominately male audience' (Brown, 2004 p. 47). Ultimately, Brown finds that there is progressive potential in this new breed of female action hero, as their appeal is not that they are women performing a traditionally male role, but that 'they combine femininity and masculinity [...] the underlying theme [is] that toughness does not need to be conceived as a gendered trait' (p. 63).

Pertinent to the discussion of male isolation, Ross (2004) argues that what certain female action heroes offer that male heroes cannot is the representation of female friendship and closeness which would be seen as unmasculine for male heroes. Addressing the TV series *Xena: Warrior Princess* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, both of which focus on a friendship between two lead female characters, Ross calls these series 'a fundamental challenge to traditional notions of heroism [which] emphasizes the *lone* hero [...] The interdependency of these series' titular heroines with their best friends refutes that heroes work best alone; rather, women need other women' (pp. 231 – 232). Ross also criticises the perennial "strong women" action heroines of *Aliens* and *Terminator*, as both were defined by their dedication to a child, and were thus 'kept isolated from other women because their loyalty resided ultimately with children's well-being. [They were] distant from "normal" women who might serve as friends [...] other adult women could not function to bring them emotional sustenance or support' (p. 235). It is not just that physical toughness and competence has ceased to be purely the purview of men, but that female heroes can



combine this toughness with a sex appeal that will not alienate a male audience, and can form close relationships in ways that would destabilise the masculinity of a male hero.

It is enlightening to read *Paradox Alice* and *The Hit Girl* in light of this. *Paradox Alice*'s Foxe, while not an "action hero" per se, is still depicted willingly manipulating the men around them with their new feminine sexuality, then later confidently announcing they 'don't need' "balls" to kill someone before emptying a pistol into their target's head. Likewise, *The Hit Girl*'s Bill, despite their new teenage body being explicitly below the age of consent (they are fourteen), is still depicted in a highly sexualised way, becoming the target of human traffickers who sell young girls into prostitution, and later allowing Bill to go undercover as a "sexy schoolgirl" stripper; none of this, of course, gets in the way of Bill unloading automatic weapons fire into their targets. As discussed above, such portrayals ultimately serve male fantasies by combining female sex appeal with acts of violence, and should also be considered in light of the work on female-to-male cross-dressers "proving" masculinity (Garber, 1992/2011; Flanagan, 2007), and Thornton's "benchmark man" (Chowdery, 1998), both discussed in Chapter 3. Both portrayals differ sharply, however, when looked at in light of Ross (2004)'s work on the representation of female relationships. Foxe of *Paradox Alice* is close to the character type Ross criticises, as they have no other female friends – the death of the only woman on board is assumed to be the catalyst for Foxe's transformation – and are ultimately left completely alone and pregnant in space, recalling Ross' observation that *Aliens* and *Terminator* use motherhood in order for their female leads to identify with the interests of the child, rather than their own interests or the interests of other women, creating a "strong woman" who is ultimately reactionary. Bill of *The Hit Girl*, however, is defined by their relationship with their niece-turned-best-friend,

which leads to Bill's identity shifting from being a self-reliant loner to being part of a group of teenage girls, closer to the more progressive depictions in *Xena* and *Buffy*.

Both films present successful embodiment of masculinity as, if not as miserable and frustrating as the failed masculinity of other characters discussed in the project so far, still ultimately unfulfilling and isolating. Through their "TG" transformations, the protagonists of both films gain the ability to combine their masculine confidence and competence with a feminine sex appeal and the ability to appear vulnerable without harming their masculinity. As discussed in Chapter 3, such an approach ultimately valorises masculinity, representing it as something for women to strive for in order to be respected, provided they also continue performing femininity – men, on the other hand, are viewed as pathetic and unmasculine should they behave in feminine ways. Rather than represent male characters who challenge masculinity by embracing traditionally feminine behaviour, "TG" media is so invested in patriarchy that it finds it simpler to transform a male character into a female character and then have that female character perform a combination of masculinity and femininity. *Paradox Alice* is especially reactionary in this regard, depicting its protagonist as a tough and competent space ship pilot who then finds "love" through being raped and dedicating their life to raising children.

## RESTRAINED TO FREE CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that the protagonists of these Restrained to Free narratives are different from those of the Rejected to Desired narratives in that they are harmed precisely *because* they successfully embody masculinity, which is revealed to be inhibiting,

isolating and harmful. Consistent with postfeminist discourse, however, this masculinity is contrasted with their acceptance of a postfeminist femininity defined by freedom of choice, pleasure gained from the conscious act of performing a highly sexualised femininity, and personal empowerment through consumption. Notably, the protagonists of these narratives did not conform to a specific type of masculinity, ranging from the subordinated teen nerds of *The Watch* to the successful businessman of *Daddy's Prom* to the playboy astronaut of *Paradox Alice*.

A common theme in these Restrained to Free narratives is the social isolation which men increasingly experience as they age, and the impersonal, unrewarding nature of the workforce. *A Midwinter Fantasy*, *Playing the Part*, *Daddy's Prom*, *The Hit Girl* and *The Watch* all depicted adult men who found themselves without women in their lives to perform emotional caretaking, and had responded by either shutting down their emotions entirely, or by lapsing into despair. Even men with women in their lives were not spared this, however, with the married couple in *The Assault* growing cold and distant from each other with age. *Paradox Alice's* premise also hinges on what happens to the all-male crew of the space ship losing contact with women entirely, leaving them with nobody to care for them, desire or subordinate. What is especially notable is that the transformation from male to female resolves this problem, but does *not* require the transformed protagonist to actually perform any emotional labour, with it instead coming “naturally” to them. This is especially notable in *Playing the Part*, in which the protagonist's new female body innately desires to please their husband sexually, with no thought given to the possibility that a woman whose life is configured entirely around her husband's sexual desires may not be more “free” than

a male office worker, consistent with postfeminist “choice” discourse. *A Midwinter Fantasy* is similar, explicitly associating adolescent femininity with a lack of personal problems. Consistent with a masculinist standpoint, this elides the issues facing girls and young women, treating them as something frivolous and insignificant in comparison to the mild ennui of a self-sufficient adult male. It is not so much that female labour is presented as easier as it is presented as *not a form of labour at all*.

A second common theme was the belief that masculinity limits self-expression by requiring one to always be “serious” and unable to engage in frivolous activities, which are – as a result of “TG” media’s reproduction of both masculinist and postfeminist discourses – always associated with femininity. In *The Assault*, this took the form of hypersexualised public behaviour, with “serious” heterosexual couples whose marriages are collapsing becoming “fun” lesbian couples who wear fetishistic costumes and publicly titillate male onlookers for their own amusement. In *The Watch*, this took the form of shopping, with male characters becoming female in order to fully enjoy consumerism, something so associated with a postfeminist femininity that is beyond the reach of men. However, both *The Assault* and *The Watch* also represent these aspects of femininity as compatible with savviness and self-control, with characters choosing to engage in it because it is fun, but crucially never surrendering to it. It is as though these narratives grasp the association between femininity and frivolity, but do not connect this to women’s subordination, and assume that women are only dismissed as frivolous because they “choose” to be so, echoing postfeminist discourses around femininity and consumerism.

As with the Rejected to Desired narratives, these Restrained to Free narratives articulate an understandable set of postfeminist masculine anxieties around how the need to constantly perform gender limits personal expression, but do so from a masculinist standpoint which ignores the experiences of women. The result is a series of narratives which view femininity as both naturally occurring and essentially frivolous, providing an escape from the labour of performing masculinity and the fear that it may fail. These narratives also depict the frivolity of femininity as a conscious postfeminist choice made by savvy, “knowing” women because they personally benefit from it, in contrast to impulsive, “bimbo” caricatures who simply cannot help themselves. This divide between impulsive and conscious femininity allows for the creation of narratives in which, rather than being looked down on or dismissed for being feminine, women can balance masculine competence with feminine frivolity and happiness – something depicted as beyond the reach of men.

## 9. SOCIAL INVERSION 3: ORDINARY TO SUPERNATURAL

This chapter will cover the third and final Social Inversion, Ordinary to Supernatural. These narratives deal with male characters who are initially ordinary, everyday men, but are then transformed into women who possess explicitly supernatural powers – a vampire, a witch, a comic book superheroine, or some other fantastical character. While their stories have little in common tonally or structurally, ranging from the light-hearted superhero comedy *Vixodus* (Infinity Sign, 2009d) to the explicit violence and sex of the erotic horror story *Spellbook of the Damned* (Seer Coltz, 2009) what unites them is a belief that female bodies possess a unique “supernatural” essence that is absent from male bodies, and the transformation from male to female allows the character access to it. This inversion is unique in that it specifically focuses on the *body*, rather than on how a character is treated socially. The protagonist of *Touched by the Hand of God*, for example, derives their supernatural powers and thirst for blood from their vampiric body, and these exist independently of how they are treated socially. However, the implicit association between the female body and the supernatural is indicative of the same gendered assumptions which underpin the “TG” media discussed previously.

Key to the analysis of this inversion is the divide between assumed male rationality, artificiality and inflexibility with assumed female irrationality, naturalness and malleability; the characters trade male lives of control and certainty for female lives where the rules – not simply social conventions, but what is and is not physically possible – are suspended. *Mother Nature* (Infinity Sign & Dread, 2010) for example, contrasts the protagonist’s male

life as a forestry worker, wielding machinery, forced to destroy a forest he cares for by the institutional power of his employers, with their female life as a supernatural nature spirit, beholden to nobody and with the life-giving power to create new trees from nothing. To begin exploring this divide before developing it further with reference to specific forms of female monstrosity, the project will return to Sherry Ortner's highly influential "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" (Ortner, 1974), discussed already in Chapter 3 and Chapter 6. What is specifically important to framing the theorists used in this chapter's analysis is the way in which Ortner describes the cultural assumption of women as existing in a state outside of rational and civilised "culture". This association between women and nature is key to understanding the Ordinary to Supernatural narratives, as it is a female body that allows the character access to "supernatural" powers – either magic, or a form of inexplicable alien technology - which exist as part of Ortner's "nonhuman realm", outside of what is rationally understood to be possible by "culture"; this frames the specific analyses of female monsters which will follow later. Ortner elaborates: 'Because of woman's greater bodily involvement with the natural functions surrounding reproduction, she is seen as more a part of nature than man is [...] thus she appears as something intermediate between culture and nature' (Ortner, 1974, p. 76), while men, without 'a "natural" basis (nursing, generalized to child care) [...] are identified not only with culture, in the sense of all human creativity, as opposed to nature; they are identified in particular with culture' (79).

The female body's "intermediate" status, as discussed earlier with reference to Ortner, is also linked with supernatural monstrosity, as is the trans\* body, a subject discussed in Chapters 3 and 6 with reference to Philips (2006) and Ryan (2009). However, as stated in this earlier discussion, the monstrosity of trans\* bodies is tied to their trans\*

nature, whereas “TG” media itself has no interest in trans\* bodies, depicting its transformations instead as a shift between two stable, heteronormative identities. For this reason, this chapter will focus on the representation of monstrosity specific to female bodies, rather than monstrosity specific to trans\* bodies, when discussing literature, although it should be noted that in both cases the fear arises from their supposed “intermediate” status (the trans\* body as “intermediate” is discussed in Chapter 3). An overview of female bodies as “intermediate” is provided by Shildrick’s article “Monsters, marvels and metaphysics” (2000). Beginning with a discussion of the film *Species*, in which ‘alien genes mixed with those of a human being produce a voracious, female-identified monster whose sole aim is to mate and reproduce’ (Shildrick, 2000, p. 303). Upon her death at the hands of ‘four men representing a variety of masculine stereotypes and a token woman’ (ibid), she is eulogised with ‘She was half us; half something else’ (ibid). This “intermediate” state is, Shildrick argues, key to monstrosity: ‘It is precisely this ambiguity that lies at the heart of what makes the monstrous body transhistorically both so fascinating and so disturbing. It is not that the monster represents the threat *of* difference, but that [its hybrid nature] threatens to interrupt difference’ (ibid). Female bodies, intermediate and malleable, thus become identified with monstrosity moreso than male bodies. Shildrick further examines the female body in ways that echo Ortner’s analysis of it as “intermediate”, referencing Kristeva’s theory of the abject. As Kristeva herself outlines in *Powers of Horror*, the abject is ‘what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders’ (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). Shildrick specifies that ‘the abject is centred on the maternal body [...] whose corporeality threatens to overflow boundaries and engulf those things which should remain separate’ (Shildrick, 2000, p. 308), while Braidotti’s *Nomadic Subjects* concurs; ‘The fact that the female body can change shape so drastically is troublesome [...]



Woman as a sign of difference is monstrous [...] anomalous and deviant' (Braidotti, 1994/2011 p. 226). Ultimately, argues Shildrick, feminism itself becomes monstrous, as it represents 'the transformation of the masculinist [...] assurance of a self-complete, self-authorising subject set against the (feminine) other [...] and the transformation of the categorical fixity of the body' (Shildrick, 2000, p. 312).

Barbara Creed (1993/2001) provides a catalogue of female screen monsters in *The Monstrous Feminine*: 'The horror film is populated by female monsters [...] The female monster, or monstrous-feminine, wears many faces' (Creed, 1993/2001, p.1). These include the monstrous mother of *Aliens*, the female vampires of *The Hunger*, the witch in *Carrie*, the monstrous womb in *The Brood*, the possessed vessel in *The Exorcist*, and the human-animal hybrid of *Cat People*, among others. As Creed argues, 'Although a great deal has been written about the horror film [...] emphasis has been on woman as a victim of the (mainly male) monster. Why has woman-as-monster been neglected [...] After all, this image is hardly new' (ibid). Creed continues:

I have used the term 'monstrous-feminine' as the term 'female monster' implies a simple reversal of 'male monster'. The reasons why the monstrous feminine horrifies her audience are quite different from the reasons why the male monster horrifies his audience [...] the phrase 'monstrous-feminine' emphasizes the importance of gender in the construction of her monstrosity. (p. 3)

Creed adopts this approach in order to break with prior analyses, such as that of Gerard Lenne, whose 'quaint, but deeply sexist, notions of chivalry' (ibid) produce analysis

which 'evades identification of female monsters [...] by dismissing them as "problematic"' (p. 4), or David J Hogan, who is 'generally dismissive of films with female monsters' (ibid). Creed's analysis, like Ortner's and Shildrick's, finds that the female body's "intermediate" status is the source of its monstrosity, with horror focusing on the crossing of boundaries, such as 'human and inhuman, man and beast [...] normal and supernatural, good and evil [...] those who take up their proper gender roles from those who do not [...] normal and abnormal sexual desire' (p. 11). To Creed, 'the notion of the material female body is central to the construction of the border in the horror film' as, citing Kristeva, 'the image of woman's body, because of its maternal functions, acknowledges its "debt to nature"'. Creed notes in particular the link between women and vampirism, which forms the core of the first Ordinary to Supernatural inversion.

## ORDINARY MEN SUCCUBMING TO SUPERNATURAL FEMALE HUNGER

This section of the chapter will discuss "TG" media narratives in which ordinary human men transform into supernatural female monsters defined by their insatiable hunger for the fluids – blood and semen – of male victims, which are required for the monster to live. In all of the "TG" media discussed in this section, this need to devour is key, with the protagonist overcome by the needs of their new body, losing all self-control and descending into an animalistic state in which their only thoughts are of eating and copulating, often with fatal consequences for the men around them. Several of these "TG" narratives foreground the protagonist's struggle with this aspect of monstrous femininity, depicting them as two characters occupying the same body; the original, rational, controlled male

personality, and the unrestrained, violent, sexual new female personality, who the original male personality attempts to keep in check. This is a particular focus of the “TG” comic *Touched by the Hand of God* (Mako, 2010a) in which the protagonist transforms from a male human to a female vampire every night, and is attempting to cure themselves of their condition before their vampiric side becomes too powerful, recalling the plots of both *Dr Jekyll and Sister Hyde* and *Dr Jekyll and Ms Hyde*, discussed in Chapter 2. This rejection of male rationality in order to indulge in animalistic, monstrous female pleasure forms the appeal of these narratives.

The devouring female monster in these “TG” narratives takes two forms: the vampire and the succubus, both of which are addressed in separate sections. The first section, ‘I need to stop becoming this thing every night’, discusses men who become female vampires, who are overcome with a need to feed on blood, while the second, ‘More! I want more of this delicious feeling!’, discusses men who become succubi, demons who gain sustenance from sexual pleasure. While both transformations foreground the devouring nature of the new female body, both monsters are drawn from different traditions, and consequently the narratives differ. This will begin with a discussion of female vampire tropes.

#### ‘I need to stop becoming this thing every night’: Normal Men to Female Vampires

The transformation of a human man into a female vampire occurs in the “TG” comics *Touched by the Hand of God* (Mako, 2010a), *Spellbook of the Damned* (Seer Coltz, 2009),

*Becoming* (OnNa, 2013) and *Vampire's Victim* (Infinity Sign, 2009b) as well as the short "TG" animation *Queen of the Dead* (Sapphire Fox & Mako, 2013) and the "TG" short film *The Interview* (Mako, 2008/2013). In *Touched by the Hand of God* and *The Interview*, the protagonist can change back and forth between their male human and female vampire forms at will, while in the others the change is permanent. While all the narratives covered in this section of Chapter 9 revolve around a female alter ego who "devours", these narratives are grouped together so that they can be examined with reference to the depictions of female vampires. While this literature argues that the "monstrous" aspects of the female body which defined female vampires have recently been the subject of redemptive interpretations which make the female vampire into a hero rather than a villain, an examination of these "TG" narratives reveals its depiction is only superficially redemptive, with the reactionary monstrosity presented uncritically.

The lengthy but unfinished series of "TG" comics grouped together as *Touched by the Hand of God* (Mako, 2010a) tells the story of a group of vampire hunters who are engaged in a covert war with a group of matriarchal vampires. Among the hunters is a reserved, restrained man called Eric, who transforms every night into a sexually aggressive, bloodthirsty female vampire named Erika, whom the other vampires believe is fated to give birth to their new leader. The contrast between Eric's normality and Erika's monstrous abnormality is repeatedly hammered home, with Eric describing himself as 'normal during the day' (Mako, 2010b, p. 9), stating that his goal is 'to be normal again' (p. 10) by purging Erika from his body, and that 'I need to stop becoming this... this thing every night' (p. 8). The transformation into Erika, meanwhile, is sexualised before it has even completed, with Erika moaning 'mmmm.... Yes!! It feels so good' (p. 14) and noting that the transformation

induces 'multiple orgasms' (ibid). Erika's personality grows increasingly hypersexualised over the course of the comic's story, beginning with Erika asking for a man to grope their breasts - 'they're so big and soft' (p. 5) – on their first meeting, and culminating with Erika becoming 'nothing more than a wild animal' (Mako, 2010c, p. 14) as they beg a rapist to impregnate them; 'Yeezzz... give me your seedz, my love. FUCK ME!!! I wantz yourz baby!!' (Mako 2010d, pp. 13 – 14). What is notable is that this behaviour is that is not linked explicitly with Erika's vampirism, but with their hormones: 'The estrogen is starting to make me think of doing things that make me sick [...] I want to be normal again' (Mako, 2010a, p. 10). *Touched by the Hand of God* ends abruptly, Mako having abandoned it to focus on other projects, but the last the audience is shown of the story is Erika using their sex appeal to hitch-hike away from town, intending to prey on the man who stops to pick them up.

A similar character dynamic also features in the self-contained "TG" comic *Spellbook of the Damned* (Seer Coltz, 2009) the story of two young men, Jonathan and Stephen, who plan to use a spellbook to transform themselves into vampires in order to gain entrance to a Halloween party. Jonny casts a spell on Stephen, who turns into a nude, female vampire with a body Jonny described as 'perfect' (Seer Coltz, 2009, p. 7) and 'sexy' (p. 8). Stephen begins groping their new female body, describing it as 'like electricity [...] flowing through me' (p. 9) before succumbing to erotic bloodlust in a similar fashion to Erika from *Touched by the Hand of God*: 'I hunger!!!! The blood in your veins... I can smell it, taste it, it's making me so hot [...] this form, these heartless breasts yearn for you...' (p. 10). Stephen then leaps on Jonathan, tearing his body apart and feeding on his blood. Announcing that, from now on, 'I shall exist for pleasure' (p. 16), Stephen adopts the name Scylla, and goes to the

Halloween party, intending to prey on the men there, ‘and some women as well, if for nothing else than to acquire more shoes’ (p. 19).

This association between female vampires and sex is a constant in “TG” media, and is not limited to the lengthier narratives discussed above. Along with *Touched by the Hand of God*, Mako has produced two further vampire-themed pieces of “TG” media; the animation *Queen of the Dead* and the short film *The Interview*. *Queen of the Dead* is simply an extended animated sequence of Eric’s first transformation into Erika in *Touched by the Hand of God*. *The Interview* is a live action film about a news reporter investigating a series of murders and discovers they are being carried out by – as in *Touched by the Hand of God* – a man who transforms into a female vampire at night, and is hunting down other vampires. Unlike *Touched by the Hand of God*, however, the female vampire in *The Interview* is not a distinct personality, and is not overcome with bloodlust or sexual desire – the man simply gains a supernaturally powerful female body at night. *Becoming*, a wordless sequence by OnNa, shows a man becoming a female vampire after ingesting blood, then seductively groping their breasts. *Formula for Conquest*, by Infinity Sign, has a male scientist acquire the blood of a vampire, but then willingly alter the blood so that it transforms him from male to female, as a vampire’s power is insufficient without ‘the lustful attraction of a woman’s body’ (Infinity Sign, 2011a, p. 7) to help them manipulate men – while they do not develop a separate “vampire” personality, their formula infects all the men in the city, transforming them into a mob of sex-crazed women. The single page comic *Curse of the Black Rose* (Seer Coltz, 2012) recalls *Touched by the Hand of God*, with its male protagonist trying to reverse their transformation into a female vampire, something only possible if they ‘Go one week without feeding or mating’, something their lust for blood and sex renders impossible. The

remainder of this section will discuss these narratives with reference to literature on female vampires.

As Creed (1993/2001) notes, 'The female vampire is abject because she disrupts law and order; driven by her lust for blood, she does not respect the dictates of [...] proper sexual conduct' (Creed, 1993/2001, p. 61). When a woman becomes a vampire, she is 'transformed from an innocent into a creature of the night who, because she has been sexually awakened, is now a threatening female figure' (p. 66). The female vampire's 'animalism is made explicit in her bloodlust [...] she hovers on the boundary between these two states' (ibid), making her something between human and an animal, in line with the theories discussed in the chapter's introduction. This model of female vampirism recalls several of the "TG" narratives discussed above, but with the key difference that, rather than an "innocent" woman becoming sexually aggressive and animalistic, it is an "innocent" *man* who is overtaken, becoming a monstrous woman who cannot control their lust for blood and sex. This is particularly true of *Touched by the Hand of God*, in which Eric is portrayed as a happily married white-collar worker who only transforms into Erika after he selflessly rushes to the aid of an injured woman on the side of the road, not knowing that she is a vampire. Erika is explicitly likened to an animal, and their behaviour is credited not just to her vampirism, but to increased levels of oestrogen, making Creed's woman / vampire / animal subtext overt. The transformed man in *Spellbook of the Damned* likewise regrets their actions once they return to their senses, not having wanted to have sex with or murder their friend prior to transformation. *Formula for Conquest's* protagonist is similarly overcome with sexual desire, but is able to control themselves when not aroused – however, their new female, vampiric body is depicted as infectious, and it transforms the

men around them into women who aggressively crave sex. This also recalls the non-vampire “TG” comics *After Conquest* and *The Girl Can’t Help It*, in which “TG” transformations are spread through contact with women, recalling the prior discussion of the female body as something mutable and without defined boundaries, posing a threat to the stable male bodies around it.

In light of Creed’s analysis, two things are notable about these “TG” vampire narratives. Firstly, all lack the figure of a male vampire hunter who seeks to destroy the female vampire, something Creed notes is key to female vampire narratives. There is no ‘patriarchal figure [who] signifies [...] the stake/phallus, the unviolated body, and the enforcement of the law’ (Creed, 1993/2001 p. 71). Even though *Touched by the Hand of God* features vampire hunters as its central cast, Erika works with them, rather than against them, and is threatened only by other vampires. This leads into the second observation, which is that these “TG” narratives depict the female vampire’s “monstrous” nature as something to be revelled in, rather than controlled or destroyed. While some of these “TG” protagonists regret their actions while overtaken by bloodlust, particularly *Touched by the Hand of God*’s Eric, becoming a female vampire also allows them access to sexual pleasure and supernatural powers that they did not possess as men. To delve further into this, the project will now look at how the portrayal of female vampires has changed over time.

As Creed notes, the female vampire’s control over her sexuality can be reinterpreted as something positive, rather than negative. In her review of the 1970 film *The Vampire Lovers*, Creed notes the appeal of the film’s female vampire villain: ‘The film clearly



contrasts the passionate sexuality of the [vampire] women with the cold, withdrawn repressed sexuality of the men [...] the stiff, unbending postures of the fathers and the sensual, eroticized bodies of the women' (Creed, 1993/2001 p. 60), with her vampirism luring 'the daughters of patriarchy away from their proper gender roles' (ibid). Judith Johnson (1993) delves further into this, noting that the depiction of female vampires as losing control of themselves came to be a 'revolt metaphor' (Johnson, 1993, p. 77) for female writers. While the "monstrousness" of the female body may be horrifying under patriarchy, 'women writers tend not to see that as a source of horror, but as a source of power' (p. 78), leading to the vampire narrative being reconfigured from a story of victimhood to a story of empowerment, which foregrounds the vampire as the protagonist rather than 'the horrific Other' (ibid). This is, so far, in line with the "TG" narrative discussed above. These "TG" narratives are using female vampire tropes to represent a man's experience of "monstrous" female desires and pleasures, and being products of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, are more willing to represent such things as desirable. However, Johnson's analysis continues onward, discussing the humane and maternal elements of female vampirism which these "TG" narratives display no interest in. In these new, woman-centred vampire narratives, a vampire's bite is 'human and sympathetic [...] more an exchange of passion than a rape' (Johnson, 1993 p. 78), and the relationship with those she bites is 'a form of mutual nurturance, a joyful and sustaining mode of love' (ibid). These new female vampires are also maternal, with the sucking of blood likened to the suckling of a baby, 'a revision of our cultural horror of motherly love' (ibid). None of the female vampires in the "TG" narrative discussed above fit this description at all, being exactly the kind of bloodthirsty, uncontrollable monsters that, in earlier vampire fiction, would need to be destroyed. Even Erika of *Touched by the Hand of God*, whose role in birthing a future

vampire leader suggests they are a maternal figure, never becomes pregnant, gives birth or even cares for a child, with their prophesised pregnancy only brought up in the context of sex and rape sequences – they are otherwise identified solely with violence and sexual aggression.

As with much of the “TG” media discussed in this project, these narratives appear caught in a contradictory space. On the one hand, they are superficially aligned with newer depictions of female vampires, in that they centre the narrative on the vampire and present her “monstrous” female nature as a source of empowerment. However, the redemptive substance of these newer narratives is missing, with these “TG” vampires still depicted as inhuman, devouring monsters, formerly innocent and now driven by an uncontrollable craving for blood and sex, resembling the earlier depictions that these newer narratives sought to counter. Rather than taking their cues from modern, female-centred vampire fiction, these “TG” vampire narratives are simply taking earlier, reactionary depictions of female vampires and presenting them as desirable without fundamentally altering the depiction itself. This is suggestive of the analyses presented in some of the backlash-focused literature discussed so far. It recalls the Men’s Rights arguments put forth in Chapters 3, 6 and 7, in which women are seen as possessing too much power and dominating men, only with the “TG” attitude that such (imagined) inequalities cannot be addressed except through transformation. Where older vampire narratives have the newly awakened female vampire destroyed for her transgressions against patriarchy, these “TG” narratives simply accept that she is already in control and cannot be stopped, devouring and corrupting helpless men at her leisure, with no male vampire hunters to stop them. Rather than using a heroic female vampire to redeem the “monstrous” aspects of the female body, “TG”

media's masculinist standpoint takes only the superficial aspects – a sexually assertive female vampire as the protagonist – and uses it to allow male characters to experience the old, reactionary take on female “monstrousness” for themselves. The following section of the chapter will address a similar form of female monster, the succubus.

#### ‘More! I want more of this delicious feeling!’: Normal Men to Succubi

The transformation from a man to a succubus occurs in the “TG” comics *Scenes from a Demonic Possession* (CBlack, 2007), *Infinite Stories 2* (Infinity Sign, 2013) *Knight of the Succubus* (Smooch, 2013), *The Ultimate Guide to Demons* (Mentalcrash, 2013) and *Zone of Absolute Transformation* (Kannel, 2014b). Like the female vampires discussed above, the succubus is a supernatural creature whose portrayal has shifted over time, and embodies numerous male anxieties around female sexuality. This section will demonstrate that these “TG” narratives completely disregard the anxieties at the root of the succubus mythology and replace them with newer anxieties which reproduce antifeminist discourses around female sexuality, not unlike those discussed in Chapter 8.

Figes' *Patriarchal Attitudes* (1970/1978), discussed earlier in this project, includes a brief discussion of the succubus in a roll call of female monsters whose power comes from seducing men: ‘Lilith and Naamah, like the Greek Lamiae before them and the medieval Christian succubi which were to follow, controlled men's bodies even as they slept’ (Figes, 1970/1978, p. 44), representing male fear that women who are “too” desirable may be covertly manipulative and no longer under male control, something echoed in the contemporary Men's Rights arguments cited in Chapters 3 and 7, in particular Warren

Farrell's claim that female sexuality is a form of bribery. To Figes, 'this is precisely what man has told woman to do [...] ancient superstitions reveal that man was well aware of the danger to which he was exposing himself, but did not know how to cope with it. However enslaved and subdued, a woman can manipulate a man if she is the object of his desire' (p. 45).

A more in-depth coverage of the succubus is provided by Ayers (2013) who writes, 'the succubus is a universal image [...] dominatrix, vixen, witch, enchantress, bloodsucker, seductress [...] demon bride, impure female' (Ayers, 2013, p. 3) who 'drains the life-force from weak-willed men' (p. 145) and 'threatens man's power by taking over his mind and penis' (ibid). This "life force" being stolen is often explicitly semen, with the succubus inseminating herself in order to birth demon children; 'Maternal femininity combines with evil' (ibid). This depletion of semen is further detailed by Cavanagh (1994), who notes the proliferation of 'traditional stories about succubi collecting semen [...] creating impotence or causing temporary or permanent castration' (Cavanagh, 1994, p. 322), though suggests that the emphasis is overwhelmingly on the act of draining men rather than on the maternal aspect; there is no 'implication of an infernal sperm bank' (p. 327). Like the female vampire, the succubus is an increasingly common feature of contemporary fantasy, with succubi appearing in the popular *World of Warcraft*, *Castlevania* and *Dungeons & Dragons* role-playing games, the TV series *Charmed* and *The X-Files*, and the *Twilight* novels. Given the succubus' ubiquity, as discussed by Ayers and Figes, the portrayals of succubi in the following "TG" narratives differ from story to story.

The “TG” comic *Scenes from a Demonic Possession* (CBlack, 2007) tells the story of a young man who awakens the morning after a Halloween party and discovers a burning humanoid shape floating behind him. The creature introduces itself as ‘a hungry succubus who needs a host’ (CBlack, 2007, p. 8) and begins to transform the man’s body from male to female, announcing ‘I couldn’t very well entice men in that pathetic body of yours’ (p. 18). After the transformation is complete, the protagonist remains conscious but loses control of their body, with the succubus taking control and telling the helpless protagonist that they are doomed to ‘experience everything I do... every orgasm, ...every sweet drop of cum, ...every deliciously lustful thought! [...] You’ll learn to enjoy it... To crave it as much as I... They always do...’ (pp. 20 – 22), implying the succubus has possessed and transformed multiple men before. While the succubus in *Scenes from a Demonic Possession* appears to be a normal human woman, other succubus transformations are overtly demonic, with wings, horn, tails, fangs, bright red skin, and other nonhuman features. Such transformations occur in the narrative *Infinite Stories 1* (Infinity Sign, 2011b.) and its sequel, *Infinite Stories 2* (Infinity Sign, 2013) The transformation in *Infinite Stories 1* resembles the vampire ones discussed in prior section, telling the story of a man who, after having sex with a succubus at a Halloween party, is cursed to transform into one every night: ‘I’m not sure what it is I turn into but I’m sure it’s dangerous’ (Infinity Sign, 2011b, p. 5). While walking home one night, he transforms painfully and collapses. A male passer-by runs to the protagonist’s aid, and is clearly aroused, looking down the protagonist’s shirt and noting ‘Her tits are barely hanging in there!’ (p. 11). The protagonist, whose succubus body has horns, red skin and fangs, leaps on the passer-by and begins sexual foreplay, only to then rip the man’s throat out and scream ‘More! I want more of this delicious feeling!’ (p. 13). The sequel comic *Infinite Stories II* also has a succubus transform its male protagonist into a

succubus with horns and fangs – ‘my sexy servant’ (Infinity Sign, 2013, p. 87) – and forces them to have sex with a series of men in order to absorb their sexual energy. While the protagonist is initially disgusted, the ecstasy eventually overwhelms them, with the original succubus commenting that the protagonist will soon ‘never know how to stop’ (p. 115).

Not all succubus transformations invoke the need to drain men’s energy, however. In the “TG” comic *The Ultimate Guide to Demons* (Mentalcrash, 2013) a young man accidentally transforms himself into a horned, bat-winged succubus, but chooses to remain that way when they realise that they are now ‘strong enough to easily take over the world’ (p. 7), with no mention of sex at all. *Knight of the Succubus* (Smooch, 2013) is a fantasy adventure about a male knight on a quest to rescue a woman who is held captive by a male monster. Confronting the monster, the knight transforms into a succubus with horns, wings and barbed whip, resembling a demonic dominatrix. The succubus then whips the monster, transforming him into a nude young woman who the succubus chains up – however, rather than freeing the young woman, the succubus chains her up as well, and sits in the monster’s old throne with her two new slaves on display. While highly sexual, this succubus clearly prefers women to men. This is also true of the monstrous demon women in *Zone of Absolute Transformation* (Kannel, 2014b) in which a man becomes trapped in a void where he is gradually transformed into a pregnant woman with extremely large breasts, then grows horns, wings and hooves, becoming a succubus. The protagonist then finds themselves in Hell, surrounded by other succubi with random combinations of horns, tails, spikes, wings and alien anatomy. The protagonist becomes a ‘breeding slut’ (Kannel, 2014b, p. 15) for these succubi, who begin groping the protagonist and reveal that their tails have penis-like tips, with the comic ending as one of the succubi announces ‘This is your home.

Now, girls... let's give her a warm welcome' (p. 15). Here the succubi not only have no interest in men, but in humans at all – they exist on their own in Hell, reproducing among themselves.

What is notable about the above “TG” comics is that the common features of the succubus, as discussed above, are radically reconfigured to suit “TG” narratives. While Ayers (2013) and Cavanagh (1994) agree that central to the succubus is that she drains, castrates or makes impotent the men she has sex with, only a single succubus in these “TG” narratives – the one in *Infinite Stories 1*, whose portrayal is closer to that of the vampires discussed above – causes any harm whatsoever to their male partner. Instead, the succubi in *Scenes from a Demonic Possession* and *Infinite Stories 2* are simply depicted as *deriving power* from sex with men, rather than siphoning their partner's energy away as in the traditional succubus (or vampire) depictions – indeed, the “victims” of the succubus in *Infinite Stories II* are left sexually satisfied and wanting more. It is also notable that these succubi are not using their sexuality to seduce and manipulate men in order to prey upon their weaknesses, as in Figes (1970/1978) characterisation of the archetype. Where Figes describes the succubus as articulating the fear that ‘a woman can manipulate a man if she is the object of his desire’ (Figes, 1970/1978, p. 45), none of these “TG” succubi possess ulterior motives or even bother engaging in seduction; rather, they are sexually assertive, proactive characters who are up front about wanting sex right then and there. What these “TG” succubi seem to embody more so than the old succubus myths is the postfeminist “sexual subjectification” argument put forward by Gill (2003), discussed in greater detail in Chapter 8. Notably, Gill calls sexual subjectification ‘the construction of a *new femininity* [...] organised around

sexual confidence and autonomy' (Gill 2003, p. 103, emphasis in original), suggesting why "TG" media, a recent phenomenon, might consider these older succubi depictions outdated.

This new conception of the succubus as a sexually assertive, debauched woman rather than a malicious demonic presence who drains male vitality is especially notable in *Knight of the Succubus* and *Zone of Absolute Transformation*, stories in which succubi display no interest in men. Indeed, in both these comics, the "TG" transformation is not of a man into a succubus, but of a man into a woman *by* a succubus who would rather have sex with women than men. Even the succubi in *Zone of Absolute Transformation*, the only ones to whom pregnancy is a factor, impregnate *each other* using penis-tipped tails rather than seeking out a man's sperm, removing men from the equation entirely. Here it should also be noted that, with reference to the previous section on female vampires, sexual relationships between women were one of the common tropes of female vampire fiction cited, with Johnson (1993) describing them as 'human and sympathetic [...] a form of mutual nurturance [...] joyful and sustaining' (Johnson, 1993 p. 78). In these "TG" succubus narratives, however, the relationships emphasise the dominance of the succubus over other women, keeping them as personal sex slaves rather than loving them as equals. This portrayal of the succubus as displaying sexual interest in women rather than men completely bypasses the male anxieties at the root of the archetype, as discussed above, and replaces them with a new series of male anxieties, this time heavily influenced by the antifeminist discourses which permeate "TG" media. This is not the old fear that women will use their sexuality to manipulate men, but that women's sexuality is a source of power in and of itself, regardless of male involvement.



## ORDINARY MEN ACQUIRING SUPERNATURAL FEMALE POWER

This second half of the chapter will discuss “TG” narratives in which men transform into women who wield magical powers that are depicted as inaccessible to male bodies. While there are a multiplicity of supernatural women depicted in these “TG” narratives – witches, forest spirits, superheroines and aliens, among others – they are united by this association between the female body and magical powers. This is sometimes made explicit, such as the way *The Watch* makes it a plot point that only women can control the heroine’s power, and other times it is implicit, such as the way *Mother Nature* associates men with industry and women with the forest, echoing the division noted by Ortner (1974) discussed in the chapter’s introduction. There are two key differences between these supernatural women and the ones discussed in the first half of this chapter. Firstly, unlike the vampires and succubi discussed earlier, these supernatural women are not driven by a need to devour or drain the men around them, and often depicted as benevolent, such as the superheroines of *Lollipop Guardian* and *Vixodus*, or at least acting in the service of what they see as a greater good, such as the forest spirit in *Mother Nature* who transforms men into trees in order to revitalise a forest. Secondly, and more importantly, the power of these female bodies is something that a male subject attempts to control, almost always successfully. This sharply differentiates them from the narratives discussed in the first half of this chapter, in which a man’s transformation into a supernatural woman results in him letting go of his inhibitions and allowing the female body to control him.

To help better organise these “TG” narratives, they have been divided into two subsections. The first, “A formidable female species”, will discuss a series of “TG” narratives in which men are transformed into supernatural female beings who wield powers associated with the female body, specifically pregnancy and Ortner’s “Nature”, discussed above. The second, “The Watch cannot be male”, discusses the portrayal of magic as a uniquely female trait in the ongoing “TG” comic *The Watch*, and something which successfully resists attempts at male control.

#### ‘A formidable female species’: Men Acquiring Female Supernatural Powers

The first “TG” narrative this section will cover is the “TG” comic *Mother Nature* (Infinity Sign & Dread 2010), which makes very explicit the relationship between male culture and female nature as discussed by Ortner (1974) in this chapter’s introduction and in Chapter 3. In *Mother Nature*, a group of loggers, all male, are in the process of demolishing a forest. One of the loggers, Anderson, suggests that they first survey the area for endangered plants before logging it, but is rebuffed with a simple ‘They’re trees, we can grow them anywhere’ (Infinity Sign & Dread, 2010, p. 3). Wandering around the forest alone, gently stroking the plants with his hands, Anderson laments that industrialisation is destroying nature, and apologises to the trees: ‘Sorry to say we have to cut you all down’ (p. 4). The trees then answer back: ‘I’m so glad to find someone like you. Someone with sympathy for the forest’ (p. 5). The plants then transform Anderson into a green-skinned female nature spirit, with Anderson observing that ‘It feels more comfortable than my old

body, as if I was always meant to be like this' (p. 11). Announcing 'We are all part of nature' (p. 13), Anderson uses their new 'lustful body' (p. 19) to seduce the loggers, transforming one into a tree and having sex with the other. Anderson then asks the remaining logger to bring more humans to the forest as sacrifices in exchange for sex, thanking the forest for 'these abilities [...] this fantastic body' (p. 23), planning to revitalise the forest by turning more men into trees.

Supernatural power is associated with pregnancy in *Permanently Pregnant Princess P.I.* (Frontios, 2009). The protagonist, Sam, begins as a male private investigator 'Ugly as sin [...] tough as nails' (Frontios, 2009, p. 2). Sam is captured by a race of aliens called the "Preggers", who resemble pregnant women (though they are not actually pregnant), and transformed into one of them using a Willendorf Venus-esque fertility idol. However, Sam is able to escape before the process affects their mind, and resolves to fight back using their new alien powers: 'I could feel their plan. They were monsters. [...] They were not just pregnant dames. They were super-powered creatures. Unstoppable monsters!' (p. 8), with Sam's violence against pregnant women justified on the grounds that 'it's not like they are pregnant or even gals' (p. 10). Sam then adopts a new identity as "The Permanently Pregnant Princess P.I.", and the story ends by previewing a rogue's gallery of villains for Sam to fight in later stories, none of which have been produced. The connection between pregnancy and the supernatural also features in the "TG" comic *Bachelor Pad* (Keshara, 2009), the "TG" animation *The Hive* (Mako, 2012b) and the feature-length "TG" movie *Paradox Alice* (Dapkewicz, 2013) in which men are transformed into female human-alien hybrids in order to produce alien offspring. While they do not gain conventional

supernatural powers in the way that *Permanently Pregnant Princess P.I.*'s Sam does, these "TG" narratives still make a point of explicitly associating pregnancy with the supernatural.

A lengthier "TG" superhero narrative occurs in *Vixodus* (Infinity Sign, 2009c), which begins with a woman in futuristic armour floating through space, explaining that Earth will soon be invaded by aliens called the Terefon who 'will use the female species to reproduce' (Infinity Sign, 2009c, p. 2). The woman then removes a bracelet and throws it towards Earth, hoping that 'a formidable female species on the planet' (p. 3) will take on her power and defeat the Terefon. On Earth, a shy, bullied, socially awkward high school student, Dayne, is walking home with his friend Maye, a girl he is secretly in love with, when they find the woman's bracelet. The bracelet identifies Maye as its new host, because she is female, and begins sending her its power. However, Maye is knocked aside by one of the Terefon, who prepares to rape her, as women are 'needed to inhabit our warriors' (p. 14). Dayne then rushes to Maye's aid, but the Terefon knocks him aside, saying that the Terefon 'have no use' (p. 19) for males. Dayne then absorbs the energy from the bracelet, becoming a duplicate of the woman from the comic's introduction, who successfully defeats the Terefon, who is caught off guard because he 'thought only females could merge' (p. 30). Because the bracelet's energy is shared between Dayne and Maye, the two must work together, with Maye having partial control over Dayne's new body, but lacking the ability to reverse the transformation. Maye and "Dana" then fight the Terefons together as a duo, with Dayne's unstable new body assimilating items of clothing from the environment to construct new costumes. The third and final issue ends with Dayne having absorbed an entire women's clothing store into a dress, and Dayne commenting "First I get transformed into a girl, and now I'm a ballerina! This is so humiliating!" (p. 85).

Other pieces of “TG” media present a man becoming a woman with supernatural powers, but have less complex narratives than those discussed above. *Lollipop Guardian* (Infinity Sign, 2011c) and *Sister Sins* (Infinity Sign, 2013b) both present similar stories to *Vixodus*, with a young man accidentally inheriting supernatural powers that were intended for a woman, which cause his body to transform from male to female, but do not feature a narrative that extends beyond the initial transformation. The three short sequences by artist Gluebubble, *Blue Babe* (Gluebubble, 2010a), *Super Blonde* (Gluebubble, 2010b) and *Super Geek* (Gluebubble, 2010c), also present stories in which a man becomes a female superhero, although there is no hint that this is somehow exclusive to female bodies; they do not even contain dialogue.

Apart from the short, dialogue-free sequences just mentioned, what is notable about all these “TG” narratives is the way in which the characters’ supernatural powers are explicitly associated with aspects of the female body. In *Mother Nature*, the protagonist’s new powers are derived from the forest and used to protect it from being demolished by an all-male crew of loggers, something which, as discussed at the beginning of this section, makes explicit Ortner’s (1974) relationship between male culture and female nature. Anderson, the one logger who is sensitive to the forest and wishes to preserve it, is depicted as only able to fully appreciate and understand nature once they are consumed by the plants and reborn as a woman, an event which recalls not just Ortner, but Shildrick’s (2000) observation that the female body ‘threatens to overflow boundaries and engulf those things that should remain separate’ (Shildrick, 2000, p. 308). Anderson’s new body likewise mirrors Ortner’s arguments as, while it resembles a human female, it has green skin, vines for hair

and is dressed in leaves, making literal Ornter's description of the female body as 'something intermediate between culture and nature' (Ortner, 1974, p. 76). While all the "TG" narratives discussed in this section hinge on the belief that the female body is something other than entirely human, it should be noted that Anderson's new female body is unique in that its supernatural power – the transformation of men into trees – is associated with femininity, rather than simply possessing superhuman strength. The transformation of men into trees both breaks down stable boundaries, something noted not just by Ortner, but also Creed (1993/2001), Shildrick (2000) and Braidotti (1994/2011), all discussed in the chapter's introduction, and functions to create new life, mirroring childbirth. Ultimately, *Mother Nature* is the story of yet another man trapped in a gendered contradiction, with Anderson feeling an innate desire to connect with nature, but unable to fully realise this on account of the male body's association with culture. A "TG" transformation remedies this, but only by reifying this discourse rather than challenging it. As will be expanded upon later in this chapter, it is also notable that Anderson remains in control after their transformation, unlike the supernatural women in the first half of this chapter, who are overcome with hunger and lose all inhibition.

*Permanently Pregnant Princess P.I.* and *Vixodus* present more straightforward superhero characters with supernatural strength and speed, rather than the forest spirit reincarnation of Anderson in *Mother Nature*. However, both comics still explicitly associate their transformed character's situation with the "need" for a female body, far from the random sex-change transformations seen in the "Babewatch" comics discussed in the project's introduction. *Permanently Pregnant Princess P.I.* is the most overt, depicting an entire alien species, the Preggers, who resemble pregnant women but are, the comic

reassures us, not *really* pregnant women. This not only makes it acceptable for the hero to punch them, but allows for them to possess the ‘morphologically dubious’ (Braidotti, 1994/2011, p. 80) pregnant female body *without* giving birth, focusing on the aforementioned monstrous nature of the maternal body without any actual motherhood. *Vixodus* is less overt, but ultimately simpler: the Terefon are an all-male species who reproduce through impregnating the women of other species, and are thus at war with the all-female species who created the armour, hoping to use them (and any other women they come across) as broodmares.

In all three of these narratives, the female body’s propensity to ‘overflow boundaries and engulf’ (Shildrick, 2000, p. 308) is key; the female forest physically absorbs Anderson before rebirthing them, the alien Preggers lack individuality and recruit by transforming male bodies into pregnant female ones, and *Vixodus* makes it explicit that only female bodies can ‘merge’ (Infinity Sign, 2009c, p. 30) with the alien armour, which is itself unstable and merges with the clothing around it. It is therefore notable that, in all three stories, the transformed protagonist retains their male mind, which exerts some control over their new body’s abject, unstable nature. Anderson can choose which men to order around, which to turn into trees and which to have sex with; they are not simply absorbing and growing in an untamed way, as the forest did. Dayne’s new body can engage in superheroics even though their costume and cosmetic appearance is not wholly under their control, with the armour’s intended *female* recipient reduced to a damsel in distress. Sam, most explicitly, acquires the “inhuman” body of a pregnant woman, but is not brainwashed, and then turns against the Preggers, allowing a rational, male mind to control the powers of an irrational, female body and use them against other female bodies.

What these narratives present is the other side of the “devouring” narratives presented in the first half of the chapter. In those narratives, a male character’s rational, cultured self was subsumed by a chaotic, female hunger, something presented as ultimately liberating and pleasurable, if also destructive. In the narratives discussed in this section, however, a male character’s mind is able to successfully dominate a supernatural female body, gaining control over its powers without also surrendering to assumed female irrationality. This focus on male characters attempting to control female power will now continue with an overview of the way “chaos” is presented as female in the ongoing “TG” comic *The Watch*.

#### ‘The Watch cannot be male’: Male Order and Female Chaos in *The Watch*

This final section of the chapter will examine the ways in which female bodies are associated with chaotic magic in the ongoing “TG” comic *The Watch*, and how this magic is coveted by male characters who wish to control it, but are unable to because of their sex. What sets *The Watch* apart from the narratives discussed in the previous section, however, is that the male characters who attempt to control female power in *The Watch* inevitably fail to do so, leading to multiple protracted conflicts throughout the thirteen years of stories in the project’s corpus.

*The Watch* explicitly presents a universe in which order is male and chaos is female, something reminiscent of the arguments made by Ortner (1974) and Creed (1993/2001),



discussed earlier in this chapter. In the world of *The Watch*, the title “Watch” is passed down from mentor to student – there can be only one Watch at a time – and signifies that the holder of the title possesses the power of raw chaos, allowing them to reshape reality as they see fit. This title is currently held by *The Watch*’s main character, Anne. The Watch’s opposite, the “Worlock”, a male ‘living avatar of Order’ (Onymous & Ericson, 2008, p. 4) named Chaos, serves as the comic’s nominal antagonist, although he largely remains in the background and does not directly interact with the cast. This section will discuss the relationship between Anne and Chaos, the portrayal of Anne’s female body as the only body in *The Watch* which cannot have its sex changed, and the ways in which male characters relate to Anne’s powers.

This division between Chaos and Anne becomes explicitly tied to male and female in the 2008 story *The Originals*, which tells the story of the first Watch and Worlock. Chaos is depicted as the first and only Worlock, but the original Watch is presented as a man who was transformed into a woman after acquiring the Watch’s chaotic powers. Chaos, representing order, can remain male (Onymous & Ericson, 2008, p. 3). While Chaos is the only character to ever bear the title of Worlock, an overview of the various women who have been Watches is presented in the 2005 story *Enter the Watch?*. It is implied that several former Watches were originally male before inheriting the power, as one panel of the comic depicts a confused young woman in an American Civil War uniform with the caption explaining that there were ‘some notable exceptions’ (Onymous & Ericson, 2005d, p. 13) to the traditional inheritance of Watch powers, and that they had ‘difficult times [...] coping with their abilities’ (ibid). *The Watch* is, however, adamant that Anne was always a girl.

That a male body cannot contain the power of The Watch is also a plot point in the 2003 story *Angelique the Defective Djinn*, in which Anne loses control of her powers and Robin attempts to resolve the situation by wishing to a genie that he had Anne's powers. This transforms Robin from male to female, as the genie explains 'All Watches are female!' (Onymous & Ericson, 2003a, p. 17). Attempts at transforming Anne from female to male always fail for this same reason. In the story *Adventures in Babysitting*, an accidental magic spell causes several characters to change ages and sexes, with Anne appearing to become a small boy named Andy, in baggy clothing and a baseball cap. After panicking that Anne's powers may have been lost, an historian of magic reassures the characters that 'The Watch cannot be male' (Onymous & Ericson, 2006d, p. 16). "Andy" then removes their pants, revealing that Anne is still female, and only her clothing and age were altered by the spell. The "filler" stories *Time Travel* (Onymous & Ericson, 2004) and *Two Guys* (Onymous & Ericson, 2006e) treat Anne's transformations similarly, with her taking on the role of an established male character in each one (Naruto from *Naruto* and Link from *The Legend of Zelda*, respectively), but only mimicking their clothing while her body remains female. A similar event takes place in the story *Dancing Queen* in which, once again, an accidental magic spell causes multiple characters to change sex. As a Watch is always female, Anne is unaffected, but hides her nature by using a 'perception filter' (Onymous & Ericson, 2012, p. 23) to create the illusion that the spell affected her too; '[Watches] can't be gender-changed. It's the best option' (ibid).

What is notable about Anne, however, is that unlike the other supernatural characters discussed in this chapter, she was always female. There is no male consciousness guiding her, and she also does not answer to any male authority figures, with Xaos, the

embodiment of masculine order, presented as an explicitly villainous force. It is made apparent as early as the first *The Watch* narrative that Xaos, while he possesses his own supernatural powers, cannot 'usher in the age of chaos' (Onymous & Ericson, 2002b, p. 13) by himself, and must take control of Anne's powers. In order to do so, Xaos must 'meld [Anne]'s powers' (ibid) with his own, as he is unable to wield them himself. Xaos' quest to harness Anne's power is a recurring thread throughout the many *The Watch* stories in the project's corpus, with them often featuring an epilogue sequence in which Xaos is revealed to have in some way manipulated the preceding narrative in order to aid his quest to steal Anne's powers. Interestingly, Xaos' quest to control Anne's powers is mirrored in Anne's best friend, Robin. While not an antagonistic force like Xaos is, Robin believes that, as a man, it is his duty to defend Anne from the many threats that arise in *The Watch*. However, being a man also means that he cannot wield Anne's powers, and she is ultimately the one who defends him. This experience leads to Robin becoming increasingly fraught over being "ordinary" in comparison to Anne, itself exacerbated by the emasculation Robin feels over being a boy who is protected by a girl. Robin, like Xaos, begins to covet Anne's power and attempts to learn magic spells himself over the course of multiple stories, leading to a series of disastrous magical accidents which Anne must resolve on her own, embarrassing Robin even further. However, unlike Xaos, Robin comes to accept that he will never harness Anne's powers, and instead focuses on learning martial arts, allowing him to regain a degree of agency.

What is notable about the characters of Xaos and Robin in *The Watch* is the way in which they make explicit what was implicit in the narratives discussed earlier in this chapter. Both characters are men threatened by female power that is beyond the reach of their male

bodies, and their response is to attempt to control it. Unlike the protagonists of the earlier narratives, however, Robin and Xaos both fail to do so, and must learn to deal with the consequences of female power existing beyond male control. Notably, Robin's acceptance that he will never be able to control the supernatural in the way that Anne does is presented as a moment of character growth which allows him to move on and reach his full potential as a martial artist; a representation which still essentialises the supernatural as female, but treats the female body as something other than a vessel.

## ORDINARY TO SUPERNATURAL CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that "TG" media is informed by the belief that the female body is something not quite human, existing in a liminal space between the rational, ordinary world and the chaotic, supernatural world. As a result, "TG" media is torn over how to relate to the female body, viewing it as both a source of mystical power which male bodies cannot wield, but also something threatening and unpredictable which needs men to control it. These "Ordinary to Supernatural" narratives explore this contradiction in one of two ways: Either by embracing this lack of control to become a kind of ecstatic animal, or using a male consciousness to directly control a female body.

The first set of narratives, dealing with vampires and succubi, depicted men who struggle with the uncontrollable, chaotic nature of the female body, losing all reason and becoming creatures driven by a base desire for food and sex. However, rather than depict these women as something which must be destroyed, "TG" media views feasting on the

blood, semen and vaguely defined “sexual energy” of men as something pleasurable which these transformed men struggle with. This is particularly true of *Touched by the Hand of God*, in which an uptight, dull businessman is only able to let go of his inhibitions when he transforms into a female vampire, experiencing sexual pleasure beyond anything their human male body is capable of. *Spellbook of the Damned* is similar, with its protagonist actively choosing the life of a bisexual female vampire despite knowing full well that they are incredibly dangerous, because the experience induces orgasm. As noted in the earlier discussion of these narratives, this presents a strange combination of older, reactionary female vampire fiction, in which the female vampire is a monster who must be destroyed, and newer, “redemptive” female vampire fiction, in which the female vampire is reconfigured into an empowering, maternal figure. “TG” presents its female vampires as both uncontrollable monsters *and* as empowering, female monsters driven by animalistic hunger who nevertheless find incredible pleasure and power in what they do. The same is true of the succubi, whose draining of men’s life force is reconfigured by “TG” media into simply supernatural hedonism, with men not even necessary, as long as orgasm is involved.

The second set of narratives dealt with the opposite theme; the notion that female supernatural power can be controlled if a male consciousness finds itself in a female body. This is suggestive of the notion, discussed in the chapter’s introduction, that the female body’s association with nature means that it can, like nature, be dominated. This is most overt in *Permanently Pregnant Princess P.I.*, in which maternal bodies are represented as literally inhuman and threatening to undermine all boundaries between both male and female, and self and other. However, a male consciousness is able to turn their power

against them, asserting control over the uncontrollable. Similarly, *Vixodus* presents a cosmic battle of the sexes in which female warriors are sought out for their childbearing capability, but has their power ultimately usurped by a man, meaning that the intended female recipient cannot defend herself. *The Watch*, however, presents a situation in which untamed, formless chaos can only be wielded by female bodies, and then actively prevents male characters from being able to control or undermine it; one of the few instances of “TG” media respecting the autonomy of a female character.

These Ordinary to Supernatural narratives are, in some ways, a development of the Restrained to Free narratives discussed in Chapter 8. Like the Restrained to Free narratives, these Ordinary to Supernatural narratives view men as cut off from sources of female power and pleasure, and women’s lives as more “natural” and intuitive, as opposed to men’s constant need to perform joyless, rigid masculinity. However, these narratives take the ideas of Restrained to Free substantially further, presenting the limitation not as a feature of masculinity, but of the male body itself, consistent with the masculinist belief that men represent normality. While the resulting narratives may appear to portray the association between women and the supernatural positively, with even the murderous vampires and succubi depicted as enjoying themselves, their supernatural nature is ultimately used for the benefit of men, either as a means of escape or as a power to be controlled. As Ortnier observes, the patriarchal association between women and nature also allows them to be dominated and used as a natural resource.

## 10. CONCLUSION

The aim of this project has been to analyse the ways in which the narratives produced and consumed by the “TG” media community reproduce contemporary reactionary discourses around gender. On the basis of a superficial engagement, it was clear “TG” media was heavily invested in binary gender, and that its representation of women as benefiting from femininity while men were troubled and burdened by masculinity suggested something akin to the Men’s Rights movement discussed in Chapter 3. Rather than a straightforwardly antifeminist discourse, however, the project’s analysis of “TG” media revealed that its focus appeared to be on grappling with the contradictions of contemporary masculinity from a purely masculinist perspective, rather than focusing solely on feminism as an ideological threat.

### Findings

The project’s first major argument, developed through Chapters 1 and 2, is that “TG” media should be considered a genre in its own right. The project argued that this online “TG” media is not simply amateur attempts at copying stories with similar subject matter, and is not the application of fantasy scenarios to trans\* themes, as their narrative approaches are very different. Likewise, “TG” media often features complex narratives and downplays or ignores sexual activity, and so should not be seen as a subset of “Rule 63”

artwork or simply as pornographic material designed to indulge fantasies of what sex is like for women. Rather, it was argued that the appeal of “TG” media rests in what this project calls Social Inversion; male characters in undesirable social situations who are able to reverse their fortunes by transforming from male to female. This runs counter to previous narratives of sexual transformation, in which men find femininity disempowering and awkward, with the experience played for either comedy or as a means of teaching the character to better respect women.

The reactionary nature of much “TG” media was obvious from a cursory examination, and this project was undertaken to better understand the discourses which informed “TG”. This project argued that, despite its representation of women as being part of a privileged class while men remain victimised and crisis-prone, “TG” does not simply reproduce Men’s Rights discourse. Key to the arguments put forth by Men’s Rights and “backlash” ideologues is that the reason for men’s current state of crisis and uncertainty is the feminism has somehow thrown a “natural” gender order out of balance, and that the solution is therefore for society to return to a prior (imagined) state of patriarchal stability. However, with the exception of a single “TG” narrative in the corpus, *D.O.L.L.Y.* (Onymous & Ericson, 2006a), feminism is never explicitly vilified, and there are no calls for women’s rights to be rolled back. Rather, “TG” protagonists *benefit* from feminism “going too far” by taking on the role of a caricature of postfeminist womanhood to whom oppression is non-existent and all choices are equally valid. The influence is not antifeminism per se, but a broader postfeminist discourse as interpreted from a masculinist standpoint.



The project also argued that, as a result of attempting to grapple with a world in which masculinity is losing its relationality to femininity, these “TG” narratives also recognise that masculinity itself is at the root of its protagonists’ problems. Masculinity in “TG” media allows for only a limited range of acceptable personal expression which causes men to constantly police themselves, feel shame for their behaviour, and harms their ability to form healthy relationships. This is entirely in keeping with the observations on masculinity made by feminists, psychologists, sociologists and – to a lesser degree – Men’s Rights Activists. Taken on its own, this suggests that the worldview of “TG” is potentially progressive and emancipatory, recognising that the artificial, constraining nature of binary gender is insufficient and ultimately harmful. This also echoes Farrell’s (1994) arguments that feminism has only concentrated on how gender has negative impacts on women, not men, and has thus neglected men’s supposed struggle. However, the “solution” posed by “TG” is still ultimately reactionary; rather than attempt to challenge these limitations and push for a model of masculinity that does not valorise violence, domination and stoicism at the cost of men’s humanity, “TG” has its protagonists transform themselves and take on femininity instead, an approach which ultimately reaffirms binary gender, suggesting that the problem is not *really* masculinity itself, but that some men are simply very bad at it, especially in a society where women are empowered. The “TG” transformations thus reify the construction of femininity as what is *not* masculinity. It is apparently easier for “TG” media to envision a world in which people can flip between two binary gender categories at will than it is to imagine a world in which such categories are blurred, malleable, or altogether absent.

The project's analysis of "TG" media's representation of femininity argued that it was a more straightforwardly reactionary postfeminist portrayal. In "TG" media, women were consistently represented as empowered, privileged and coddled by a world in which feminism successfully consigned *structural* sexism to the history books. However, "TG" media's commitment to a masculinist standpoint means that it has not engaged with what feminists identified as the negative aspects of backlash discourse. Key to postfeminist discourse is the notion that women are now "too" free and thus in crisis, having lost some essential femininity by attempting to break away from domesticity into roles they are "unsuited" to, but "TG" media is interested only in images of newly "liberated" and "empowered" young women who choose femininity on their own terms. Similarly, the representation of femininity as a "choice" pervades "TG" media, again suggesting a very superficial engagement with discourses of beauty and femininity, best theorised by the literature discussed in Chapter 7. The project argued that "TG" media accepts the "overt" but not the "covert" nature of these discourses, uncritically presenting cosmetics, fashion, dieting and "sexual subjectification" (Gill, 2003) as sources of power, pleasure and self-expression. What is notable about these "overt" discourses is that they are aimed at women with the intent that women internalise their messages for the benefit of patriarchy, yet "TG" media depicts these messages being internalised by *men*. A recurring observation in the work on the link between postfeminism and "sexual subjectification" is that it has grown more intense over time; see in particular the way in which Faludi (1991/2006), Whelehan (2000) and Gill (2003), when read chronologically, chart the journey from "liberated single girl" to "sexual subject" over the course of a decade. The project argued that the unironic reproduction of these messages in "TG" media suggests that their increasing prominence

and intensity has led to men uncritically accepting them as representations of what positive experiences are for women, rather than as a performance catering to male desire.

## Contributions and Implications

As no prior academic studies of “TG” media existed at the time of this project being undertaken, there were a number of significant gaps in knowledge which this project aimed to address, specifically the existence of the “TG” genre and the assumptions about gender which informed its narratives. In addition, issues pertaining to the contemporary form of the postfeminist “crisis of masculinity” discourse were addressed with reference to the content of “TG” media, suggesting “TG” has value as a heuristic for addressing these issues. What is especially notable is that much “TG” fiction appears to result from men internalising reactionary discourses aimed at women, but with post-feminist assumptions.

This project has demonstrated the existence of “TG” as a distinct genre with its own generic conventions and a dedicated audience of “TG” fans. While prior in-depth studies of trans\* representation in fiction had been carried out, as detailed in Chapter 3, those focused on the representation of specific trans\* character archetypes and narrative tropes across multiple genres – crime, comedy, horror, adventure, etc. – which prominently featured a trans\* character. “TG” media presents the inverse of this, in which “TG” itself is the story’s genre, with character archetypes and narrative tropes then brought in from other genres in service of the “TG” story. This was best demonstrated in Chapter 2, in which

narratives that prominently featured the kind of magical sex-change transformations that dominate “TG” media were dismissed and criticised by the “TG” audience for not adhering to the expected “TG” conventions. Understanding “TG” as a genre allows for more productive analysis of “TG” texts than simply treating them as amateur attempts at cloning mainstream narratives which deal with similar subject matter, and future studies of trans\* representation in fiction may wish to take the distinction into account when engaging with material which identifies itself as being “TG”. Such future scholarly encounters with “TG” are increasingly likely, as new original “TG” media is being produced consistently, and is easily accessible by anyone with a search engine; indeed, as discussed in the introduction, “TG” media already has something of a profile outside the “TG” community, albeit as a target of humorous mockery.

It is also possible that the tropes and motifs of “TG” will become more prominent in mainstream fiction. While focused on the online, amateur “TG” media community, this project identified that the 2002 film *The Hot Chick* and the 1994 comic *Une Femme dans la Peau* approached their fantastic sex-change premises in a similar way to “TG” media, representing women’s lives as unequivocally simpler and more pleasurable than men’s. If, as argued by the scholars of post-“backlash” feminism quoted throughout the project, the dominant image of contemporary Western women is that they are no longer oppressed, then mainstream narratives of fantasy sexual transformation must change to suit this new depiction of women. Both *The Hot Chick* and *Une Femme dans la Peau* uncritically reproduce this discourse, depicting women as carefree, assertive and “sexually subjectified” in comparison to men, while other mainstream narratives, while not entirely accepting of

this view of women, are still influenced by the “empowerment” discourse of the 1990’s and early 2000’s. *Mantra*, *She-Zow* and the “Babewatch” event, discussed in Chapter 2, all present superhero stories in which a male character becoming female does not limit them being physically powerful, proactive or heroic in any way, with femininity leading to, at worst, personal embarrassment rather than serious vulnerability or structural oppression. As long as the “empowerment” discourse dominates the depiction of women, mainstream narratives of fantasy sexual transformation are more likely to resemble the genre conventions of “TG” media, and the analysis undertaken here could contribute to understanding them.

Outside of discussing the media itself, however, the most fruitful contribution of this project is that “TG” media’s representation of masculinity and femininity reveals something about the contemporary “crisis of masculinity”, suggesting that “TG” has applications as a heuristic for understanding male anxiety and its reactionary outcomes. As introduced in Chapter 5 and argued throughout the project, “TG” media’s standpoint is implicitly masculinist, and thus heavily invested in male dominance and strict binary gender roles. This means that, while “TG” media does not explicitly cite feminism as the root cause of its characters’ problems, the ways in which feminism has challenged the tenets of masculinism remain at the base of its characters’ anxieties. The possibility that men *could* escape from the confines of masculinity is something “TG” characters are aware of, yet this possibility is hampered by the knowledge that men breaking away from masculinity invites violence, ridicule, and alienation. With masculinism simultaneously eroding and violently clawing back lost ground (Agius & Nicholas, 2018), “TG” characters are caught in a contradiction.

However, “TG” media also ultimately reaffirms binary gender, and depicts a complete physical transformation as more palatable than challenging the construction of masculinity. This suggests a worldview in which men understand their frustrations and anxieties with gender as a result of masculinity itself being limited, rather than a previously harmonious world being thrown into chaos by the gains of feminism, yet are also unwilling to challenge the way in which masculinity it constructed, and view femininity as more malleable and accepting of difference. Such ideas are unlikely to be articulated directly – they are complex and could be experienced affectively (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of “phallic panic” affect) rather than consciously understood – but the fantastical premises of “TG” stories allow for the “TG” creators and audience to express and toy with these ideas.

## Limitations

Given that the study of “TG” media is largely unmapped terrain, this project was only able to engage with a fraction of the “TG” material available on the web, and to do so using a single standpoint and methodology. This project’s focus was on a “visual media” corpus of comics and videos. A large collection of “TG” prose fiction also exists online, where it is archived alongside more traditional trans\* prose stories on the website *FictionMania*, which is to “TG” prose as *TG Comics (and Stories)* is to comics. The widespread distribution of visual media online is also a relatively recent development that came about with increased internet speed and the availability of “Web 2.0” content sharing platforms like Blogger, Wordpress and DeviantArt, making the development of “TG” prose fiction an historical

antecedent to the contemporary “TG” multimedia culture. Shifting from the past of “TG” to its future, “TG” video games represent a far more recent development in “TG” media which has come about thanks to the increasing accessibility of amateur video game development kits, in particular the hugely popular *RPG Maker* series, which are cheap and require no programming knowledge to use. As with prose fiction, the narrative possibilities provided by video games, particularly the use of the player’s decisions to dictate the course of the narrative, result in different kinds of stories being told. While “TG” video games were not part of the project’s corpus, some were downloaded and played in the early stages of research, and the ability to choose the kind of woman the protagonist transforms into was heavily emphasised, with some games containing dozens of potential bodies. Indeed, one of the reasons that the 2015 “TG” video game *Gender Bender DNA Twister Extreme*, mentioned briefly in Chapters 1 and 2, was able to exceed its donation goal six times over was that the developers promised a greater variety of potential women to for the protagonists to transform into should donations continue.

The project’s corpus was largely drawn from the website *TG Comics (and Stories)* which, while it hosts a large archive of work from a variety of writers and artists, is far from the only source of “TG” media online, with other websites representing potential avenues of future research. The ubiquity of “TG Caption” blogs was discussed in Chapter 2, though they were not included in the corpus for reasons discussed in Chapter 4, and this represents a significant gap in understanding “TG”. Similarly, while the corpus did include multiple “issues” of the ongoing narrative “TG” comic *The Watch*, other ongoing narrative comics were not discussed, due to them being less popular. These ongoing narrative comics are

structured differently to the self-contained ones hosted on *TG Comics (and Stories)*, with their characters and story lines developing gradually over years, and characters spending far more time adjusting to their new lives after “TG” transformations. For example, the premise of the ongoing narrative “TG” comic *Exiern* is that the protagonist is seeking a way to reverse their transformation, something more fitting to the comic’s format as a single long story than to the shorter, self-contained works archived on *TG Comics (and Stories)*.

*Abstract Gender* is similar, telling the story of two boys who are transformed into girls and both adapt differently, with one attempting to reverse it with the other coming to prefer it to being male. The lack of lengthier, serialised narratives like this in the project’s corpus is a limitation which future research may wish to address. If so, this project’s findings will have value as a potential framework.

This project also chose to engage with “TG” media using social science and feminist theory in order to understand its underlying ideology, but other approaches to “TG” are necessary to fully understand it. While genre theory was referenced in Chapter 2 to make the case that “TG” is a genre, this engagement still came from a perspective more concerned with social science than media studies. Approaching this material from a media studies perspective would allow for engagement with aspects of “TG” media this project did not focus on. The way in which the visual media format allows for the mutability of characters, for example, or the way in which pre-existing media images are recontextualised, represent potential new approaches. Social Inversion, meanwhile, meant that this project was concerned with how the social situations of characters change from negative to positive, meaning that its attention was split between the depiction of men *and* the



depiction of women, resulting in gaps that a project focused on one side or the other could address. The subject of ethnicity was also outside the scope of the project. The depiction of men becoming nonspecifically “Asian” women was touched on in the discussion of *The Watch* and *The Assault*, but is rich enough field to discuss on its own, with other “trans-racial” transformations existing in the “TG” media archives. In-depth analysis of the depiction of sex acts in the more explicit pieces of “TG” media was also outside the scope of the project, but represents a potential future avenue of inquiry. There was also no engagement with the creators of “TG” or the “TG” audience as people; this project has represented the “TG” community largely through its media output, yet dedicated “TG” forums, like the *Metamorphose.org* discussions quoted in Chapter 2, produce lengthy “TG”-related discussions between creators and audiences, something which could sustain a research project of its own.

### Recommendations for Further Research

As discussed above, the application of “TG” media as a heuristic for understanding contemporary male anxiety yielded useful results, and has further applications. From a social science perspective, discussing the way in which men outside of the “TG” community react to the texts has value, as the issues faced by the protagonists seem to be common among young men. Do young men who reject the overt reactionary nature of the Men’s Rights movement still believe that men are oppressed and that women’s lives are too easy?

An ethnographic study of “TG” discourse outside of “TG” media itself is also recommended as a following step to this project, as its engagement with the creators and audience of “TG” were limited. While it is clear that most “TG” media deals with heterosexual, cisgender, white, able-bodied men, it is unclear how accurately this reflects the demographics of the creators and audience. In particular, the proportion of the “TG” audience who identify themselves as same-sex attracted or trans\* is important to understand; just because characters in “TG” are heterosexual and cisgender does not *necessarily* guarantee that their readers are. Likewise, how do trans\* people feel about “TG” media? It should be noted that, in the comments of the *Your Webcomic Is Bad And You Should Feel Bad* review quoted in the introduction, an anonymous commenter identifying as trans\* laments the increasing popularity of “TG” media: ‘Its [*sic*] fucking offensive [...] its [*sic*] making people like me look like some sort of fucking pervert’ (David, 2007). At least one “TG” media creator, Mako, now identifies as trans\*, although did not identify as such when their “TG” media was created. This suggests that “TG” media may function as a space to explore questions of gender identity, albeit in a way that is reactionary and relies heavily in binaries. Researching the ways in which trans\* people have engaged with “TG” media, positively or negatively, represents another potential area of further research.

Engaging with either a different corpus of “TG” texts, or more deeply with a single ongoing “TG” narrative, is also recommended. There is, for example, almost fifteen years’ worth of *The Watch* available online, enough to sustain a research project by itself. Aside from *The Watch*, other ongoing “TG” narratives exist, such as the fantasy comics *Exiern*, *The Dragon Doctors* and *Sparkling Generation Valkyrie Yuuki*, all of which have been running for

over a decade. An approach to how “TG” treats certain genres would also be useful, as this project has largely ignored non-“TG” genre conventions. Given the number of “TG” narratives which take place in fantasy settings, for example, it would be useful to look at how these narratives adapt the genre’s conventions. The way in which the “TG” audience reject “mainstream” narratives of transformation, too, is worthy of further study, as the two contrasting approaches reveal more about masculinism as an ideology.

It should also be noted that, as discussed briefly in Chapter 1, “TG” is an outgrowth of a larger online “transformation enthusiast” culture, which produces and archives narratives of people transforming into animals, inanimate objects, articles of clothing and changing size, among others. Discussion of this culture itself is lacking in academia, and studying it may reveal something about the nature of online presence (one’s online presence is, after all, mutable), although unlike the transformations featured in “TG” media, the people in these transformation narratives are not necessarily undergoing a Social Inversion; can this model be applied to the story of a man who becomes a marble fountain?

## Closing

The seeds of this project were sewn over a decade ago, when the growing popularity of *The Watch* led to it becoming a magnet for online mockery. Along with its art, writing and choice of subject matter, a common target was the way in which *The Watch*’s creators and fans insisted that the comic was intended to be “fun” rather than sexual. This flew in the face of *The Watch*’s overwhelming focus on transforming men into women with large,

prominently displayed breasts, and was assumed to simply be a cover story the creators had concocted to avoid admitting the sexual nature of their work. However, after looking more deeply into the content of *The Watch*, the “fun” argument began to develop a ring of truth to it; being female in *The Watch* was depicted as “fun” in a way that being male simply wasn’t. Women and girls in *The Watch* were socially sanctioned to be more frivolous than boys and men, while also receiving constant positive attention for simply standing around and looking pretty. This, rather than heaving bosoms per se, was the appeal.

The purpose of this project was to develop this observation into a serious line of academic inquiry, and apply it to the broader “TG” media community which had steadily grown over the intervening years. As the project has demonstrated, these narratives, like *The Watch*, are often interested in transforming a character’s social experience first and foremost, with the physical transformation functioning as a means to an end. Through an in-depth analysis of “TG” media texts using a framework that foregrounds the relationality of masculinity and femininity, the masculinist anxieties at the heart of “TG” media were able to be laid bare and engaged with seriously in a way no other analysis of “TG” media had attempted. These findings are relevant not simply to “TG” media, but to understanding the ways in which men and boys feel trapped in irresolvable contradictions and long for a way of being in which things are simpler and more certain. That they see *femininity* this way is deeply problematic, but that such a desire for change exists is notable and could potentially be seized on to help consciousness-raising among men, provided they learn to listen to women first.

## APPENDIX A: DATA CODING - SUPERFICIAL CONTENT

<b>Table A1: Superficial content of <i>TG Comics (and Stories)</i> "Comics"</b>					
Available from <a href="https://tgcomics.com/tgc/comics/">https://tgcomics.com/tgc/comics/</a> unless noted					
<b>TITLE</b>	<b>CONTENT RATING</b>	<b>GENRE</b>	<b>TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP</b>	<b>TRANSFORMATION AGENCY</b>	<b>LGBT CONTENT?</b>
Animus of Celena, The	R	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Anniversary in Vegas	M	Magic	Male to Female	Voluntary	Bisexual Woman
Assault, The	M	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Accidental	Bisexual Woman
Bachelor Pad	M	Horror, Science Fiction	Male to Female	Forced	-
Beggars Can't Be Choosers	R	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Forced	Bisexual Woman
Best of Friends	X	Magic	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Bewitching Attraction	X	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Accidental	-
BFFs: Best Friends Forever <sup>7</sup>	-	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Bus Stop	C	Fantasy, Magic	Male to Female	Forced	Questioning Masculinity
Cheap Motel	R	Magic, Slice of Life	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Chronos Medley	X	Fantasy	Male to Female	Accidental	-
CodeName: Agent Kitty	R	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Complex Eve	C	Adventure	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Daddy's Prom	R	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-

<sup>7</sup> Available from <https://tgtony.deviantart.com/art/BFF-Best-Friends-Forever-Pt1-168406985>

**Table A1: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Comics” (Cont’d)**

Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/comics/> unless noted

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Date Game, The	X	Erotic Romp, Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Demons in the Dark	M	Horror, Supernatural	Male to Female	Forced	-
Detective Darvy	X	Crime	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Devil’s Playground	X	Horror, Supernatural	Male to Female	Forced	-
Doki Doki Crossdressing Date	X	Slice of Life	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Eden	C	Slice of Life	Male to Female	Forced	-
Embracing Yin	R	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Ex, The	M	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Fall of Nano, The	M	Science Fiction, Superhero	Male to Female	Forced	-
Fantasy Spell	X	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Fitting In	M	Experimental, Slice of Life	-	Voluntary	Trans Woman
Fool’s Jewel 1	X	Black Humor, Magic, Pure Smut, Science Fiction	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Fool’s Jewel 2	X	Black Humor, Magic, Pure Smut, Science Fiction	Male to Female	Accidental	-

**Table A1: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Comics” (Cont’d)**

Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/comics/> unless noted

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Fool’s Jewel 3	X	Black Humor, Magic, Pure Smut, Science Fiction	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Fun with Units	X	Erotic Romp, Humor, Science Fiction	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Gallery, The	R	Fantasy, Magic	Male to Female	Forced	Questioning Masculinity, Bisexual Woman
Girl Can’t Help It, The	X	Pure Smut, Science Fiction	Non-Normative	Accidental	-
Girl In My Dream	R	Humor, Supernatural	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Gypsy’s Curse, The	M	Horror, Supernatural	Male to Female	Forced	-
Hanover Tales	-	-	Male to Female	-	Trans Woman
Hard-Core Slacker	M	Psychological	Male to Female	Forced	-
Hot Date, The	M	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-
I’m A Girl Now!	X	Mystery, Slice of Life	Male to Female	Forced	-
Incompatible	M	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Infinite Stories 1	X	Horror, Magic, Science Fiction	Male to Female, Female to Male	Forced, Accidental, Voluntary	Bisexual Woman, Same-Sex Attracted Woman

**Table A1: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Comics” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/comics/> unless noted

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Infinite Stories 2	X	Horror, Magic	Male to Female	Forced, Accidental, Voluntary	-
Last Penalty <sup>8</sup>	-	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Marble Monkey, The	M	Magic	Male to Female, Non-Normative	Accidental	Same-Sex Attracted Woman
Mask of Venus 1, The	R	Adventure, Science Fiction	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Mask of Venus 2, The	R	Adventure, Science Fiction	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Mask of Venus 3, The	R	Adventure, Science Fiction	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Merry Gift, A	X	Horror, Psychological	Male to Female	Forced	Bisexual Woman
Mirror’s Cycle	R	Humor, Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Mukowski, P.I.	X	Mystery	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Narcissus Twin	M	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Novaderm	M	Science Fiction, Slice of Life	Male to Female	Voluntary	Trans Woman
One Hell Of A Night!	M	Black Humor, Supernatural	Male to Female	Forced	-
Opposite Effect <sup>9</sup>	-	-	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Payback Possession	X	Pure Smut, Supernatural	Male to Female	Voluntary	-

<sup>8</sup> Available at <https://e-hentai.org/g/415588/f406bcfae9/><sup>9</sup> No longer available.



**Table A1: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Comics” (Cont’d)**

Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/comics/> unless noted

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Playing the Part	X	Horror, Romance, Supernatural	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Reign of Cruella	M	Humor, Magic	Male to Female	Voluntary, Forced	Same-Sex Attracted Woman
Second Chance, A	M	Magic	Male to Female, Female to Male	Accidental	Bisexual Woman
Speed Date	C	Fantasy, Magic	Male to Female	Forced	Questioning Masculinity, Same-Sex Attracted Woman
Spirit of Christmas	R	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Taboo Beauty	X	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Tales from the Butterfly Salon	M	Fantasy, Magic, Psychological	Male to Female	Forced	-
Time to Kill	X	Horror, Humor, Psychological	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Touched by the Hand of God	M	Horror, Supernatural	Male to Female	Forced	-
TS, I Love You	X	Romance	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Video Game, The	M	Erotic Romp, Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Vixodus	C	Science Fiction, Superhero	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Werewif, The	C	Supernatural	Male to Female	Forced	-

**Table A1: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Comics” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/comics/> unless noted

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
When the Right Man Comes Along	M	Horror, Supernatural	Male to Female	Forced	-
Wish, The	X	Humor, Slice of Life	Male to Female	Accidental	-

**Table A2: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Vignettes”**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/vignettes/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
(G)irl	R	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
44 Minutes til Midnight	M	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Accidental	-
A Halloween Affair	M	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	Same-Sex Attracted Woman
After Conquest	R	Horror	Male to Female	Forced	-
All a Girl Needs	R	Fantasy	Male to Female	Accidental	-
All My Love	M	Romance	Male to Female	Voluntary	Same-Sex Attracted Man
Babe Note	R	Crime, Supernatural	Male to Female	Forced	-
Bloodhound, The	C	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Boys of Summer, The	M	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Chrysalis	M	Fantasy	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Computers Never Lie...	C	Humor	Male to Female	Forced	-
Crafting a Witch	C	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-

**Table A2: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Vignettes” (Cont’d)**

Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/vignettes/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Cure for Jealousy, The	R	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Date, The	R	Science Fiction	-	-	-
Decision, The	M	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Voluntary	Trans Woman
Didn't Your Mother Ever Tell You...	R	Humor, Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Double Date	C	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Forced	-
Dr. Why – The Lost Season	C	-	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Draco	R	-	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Empathy	R	Humor, Magic	Male to Female, Female to Male	Voluntary	-
Experimental Machine	R	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Forced	-
Festival	M	Fantasy, Historical, Surreal	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Freebie	R	Fantasy, Humor	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Heroic Comics: G-Girl – At What Price Victory?	C	Magic, Superhero	Male to Female	-	-
Heroic Comics: G-Girl at the Bat	C	Magic, Superhero	Male to Female	-	-
Heroic Comics: The Case of the Solicitor's Safe	C	Magic, Superhero	Male to Female	Accidental	-

**Table A2: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Vignettes” (Cont’d)**

Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/vignettes/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Heroic Comics: The Mystery of Sylph	R	Superhero, Supernatural	Male to Female	Forced	-
Heroic Comics: The Mystery of Winter Wonderlass	C	Magic, Superhero	Male to Female	Forced	-
Heroic Comics: The Unexpected Origin of Raven Gold	C	Magic, Superhero	Male to Female	Forced	-
Idol Worship	X	Erotic Romp	-	Voluntary	Trans Woman
Kannel: Easter Retribution	M	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Kittyhawk: Model	X	Humor	Male to Female, Female to Male	Spontaneous	-
Kittyhawk: Out of Town	X	Humor	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Lab Accident	R	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Accidental	Same-Sex Attracted Woman
Legs Goes Clubbin’	C	Humor	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Lollipop Guardian	C	Superhero, Supernatural	Male to Female	Forced	-
Miss Mako: Eleven	R	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Forced	-
Miss Mako: The Addiction	R	Magic	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Miss Mako: The Black Rabbit	R	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-

**Table A2: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Vignettes” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/vignettes/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Miss Mako: The Croft Legacy	R	Magic	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Miss Mako: The Curse of Anahki	R	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Miss Mako: The Fall of Camelot	C	Fantasy, Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Miss Mako: The Hive	R	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Forced	-
Miss Mako: The Kiss	R	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Miss Mako: The Siren	R	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Miss Mako: The Witching Hour	R	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Miss Mako: Touched by the Hand of God	R	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Miss-ter Universe	R	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Mother Nature	R	Supernatural	Male to Female	Forced	-
Nothing But Fools	M	Humor	Male to Female	Forced	-
Nu-Life 1	R	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Nu-Life 2	R	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Nu-Life 3	R	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Voluntary	Same-Sex Attracted Woman
Nu-Life 4 – After Hours	M	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Voluntary	Same-Sex Attracted Woman

**Table A2: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories) “Vignettes” (Cont’d)***

Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/vignettes/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Nu-Life 5 – The Employee Evaluation	R	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Voluntary	Same-Sex Attracted Woman
Office Downsizing	C	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Pauper and the Princess, The	C	Humor, Magic	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Permanently Pregnant Princess P.I.	R	Humor, Superhero	Male to Female	Forced	-
Pizza Dude	R	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Forced	-
Playoffs, The	M	Magic	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Poster Girl	R	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Rabbit’s Foot	C	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Rescue of a Princess	C	Fantasy	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Rose, The	R	Fantasy, Romance	Male to Female	Accidental	Trans Woman
Santa Stops, The	C	Magic, Science Fiction	Male to Female	Accidental, Forced	-
Scenes from a Demonic Possession	R	Magic, Supernatural	Male to Female	Forced	-
Selling Candy	R	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Simple Favors	M	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Forced	-
Sister Sins Fairy Tales	R	Fantasy, Superhero	Male to Female	Forced	-
Spellbook of the Damned	X	Horror	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Spraypaint	C	Humor,	Male to Female	Voluntary,	-

**Table A2: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Vignettes” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/vignettes/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
		Science Fiction		Forced	
Sunday in the Park with Peri	C	Fantasy, Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	Bisexual Woman
Switch	R	Fantasy	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Temazcal	M	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Tonisha	C	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Vampire’s Victim	X	Pure Smut, Supernatural	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
What If... Professor Black	C	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	
What If... Secrets	C	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	Same-Sex Attracted Woman
Witchwood	R	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-

**Table A3: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Sequences”**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/sequences/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
333,333	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
500+ Kisses	C	Humor	Male to Female	Forced	-
All Dressed Up	R	Simple TF	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Atlass	R	Magic	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Babe-barian Too, The	C	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Babe-barian, The	C	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Baby Got Back (at Ya)	R	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Band of Gold	R	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Becoming	R	Supernatural	Male to Female	Accidental	-

**Table A3: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Sequences” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/sequences/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Beer Goggles	C	N/A	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Belt	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Belt 2	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
BF 2 GF	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Big Rack	C	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Blue Babe	C	Superhero	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Bobby’s Wish	R	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Body Zipper	R	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Voluntary	Same-Sex Attracted Woman
Bodybuilder	R	N/A	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Born on the Fourth of July	C	Magic	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Bride, The	C	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Bubblegum	C	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Buff 2 Blob	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Forced	-
Buff2Babe	R	N/A	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Built	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Bust Stop	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Camera	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Center of Attention	R	Magic	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Champagne Wishes	R	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Change of Business	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Classy Goth Girl	C	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Comic Book Babe	R	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	Same-Sex Attracted Woman
Cosplay Contest, The	R	Magic	Male to Female	Voluntary	-



**Table A3: Superficial content of TG Comics (and Stories) "Sequences" (Cont'd)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/sequences/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Crimson and the Black, The	R	N/A	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Crossing the Street	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Crystal, The	C	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Dancing Queen	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Dandeman	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Darvy	R	Magic	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Death of Eric Smith, The	R	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Death Wears a Thong	R	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Deconstruction of Kyle, The	C	N/A	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Development	R	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Doctor Jeckyll and Nurse Hyde	C	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Double-D Dragon	C	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Drag Queen	R	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Dream Dance	R	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Dress	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Dress 2	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Duel, The	R	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	Same-Sex Attracted Woman
Evil Angel	R	Supernatural	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Evolution of Nick, The	C	N/A	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Experiment, The	C	Humor	Male to Female	Voluntary	Trans Woman
Fanboy	C	Superhero	Male to Female	Voluntary	-

**Table A3: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Sequences” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/sequences/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Farhad’s Cosplay	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Fashion Pill	R	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Femme Noir	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Femmed Fatale	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Finding the Right Look	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
First Person POV	R	N/A	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Fortune Cookie	C	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Freckles	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Free Date – Restrictions Apply...	C	Humor	Male to Female	Forced	-
Friend with Benefits	R	N/A	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Friends	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Friends 2	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Gangsta Wannabe	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Gender Bent	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Genie Dance, The	C	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Getting Some Tail	R	Simple TF	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Gimme a T, Gimme an A	R	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Gloves Off	R	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Goblin’s Day at the Beach, A	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Goblin’s Day Job, A	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Voluntary	-

**Table A3: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Sequences” (Cont’d)**

Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/sequences/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Goddess	C	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Going Amazon	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Gomy	R	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
GOOAALLL!	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Green with Envy	C	Simple TF	Female to Male	Spontaneous	-
Growing Gazangas	R	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Guy 2 Gal	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Guy 2 Goth	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Guy 2 Spy	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Gym Class Hero	R	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Gypsy Wagon, The	R	Humor	Male to Female	Forced	-
Hair’s the Thing	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Harry, Venus Hunter	R	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Forced	-
He’s So Lucky She’s a Star	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Heat Wave	R	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Hidden Redhead	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
I Do Feel Lucky	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Injection	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Voluntary	Trans Woman
It Happens	R	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
It Worked!	R	Simple TF	Male to Female	Voluntary	Trans Woman
Jewel on 34 <sup>th</sup> Street, A	C	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Jock Itch	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	Questioning Masculinity
Just One More Time	M	Science Fiction	-	Voluntary	Trans Woman

**Table A3: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Sequences” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/sequences/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Kali-Fornication	M	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Knight of the Succubus	R	Supernatural	Male to Female	Voluntary, Forced	Same-Sex Attracted Woman
Lady of the Lake	R	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Leather	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Light Reading	C	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Little Fairy, A	R	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Little Miss Fortune	C	Humor	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Little Nathaniel	C	N/A	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Lucky Be a Lady Tonight	C	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
M2F	R	N/A	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Mask Effect	R	Magic	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Match Game	R	Magic	Male to Female	Voluntary	Same-Sex Attracted Woman
Mechanic, The	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Men’s Room	X	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Military Maternity	C	Magic	Male to Female, Female to Male	Spontaneous	-
Miss Mako: Paradox Alice	R	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Miss-tletoe	C	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Mistletoe	C	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Morning	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Morning 2	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Morph	C	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Morphinator, The	R	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Mr./Mrs. Mako	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-

**Table A3: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Sequences” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/sequences/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Narcissus	R	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	Same-Sex Attracted Woman
Narcissus 2	R	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	Same-Sex Attracted Woman
New Dish, A	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
New Shoes for Julian	C	Humor	Male to Female	Accidental	-
New Shoes for Julian (Revisited)	C	Humor	Male to Female	Accidental	-
New Suit, A	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
No Fat Chicks	C	Humor	Male to Female	Forced	-
Not So Cocky Now	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Now You’re Cooking	C	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Nu-You Skin	R	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
On The Pill	C	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
One Bite of the Apple	C	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
One Fugly Beach	R	Simple TF	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
OnNa: Dire Girl	R	-	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
OnNa: Morning Glory	R	-	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Out for a Jog	R	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Over Femme	R	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Pageant, The	C	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-

**Table A3: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Sequences” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/sequences/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Party Girl	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Party Girl 2	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Pelvis	X	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Pixie Dust	C	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Porn Star Is Born, A	M	Simple TF	Male to Female	Forced	Same-Sex Attracted Woman
Pornstache Gone Wrong	C	N/A	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Probing Dilemma, A	R	Simple TF	Male to Female	Forced	-
Rave New World	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Reluctant Pin-up, The	R	N/A	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Remote Wars	R	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Forced	-
Repayment Plan	C	Crime	Male to Female	Forced	-
Return of the Boob Fairy	R	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Return of the Tank Guy	C	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Ring, The	R	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Rock Star	C	N/A	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Running	R	N/A	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Sex Swap	R	Simple TF	Male to Female, Female to Male	Spontaneous	-
She-Wolf of Suburbia, The	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Silver Spin	C	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Simple Case of the Floozies, A	R	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Skirt Chaser	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-

**Table A3: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Sequences” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/sequences/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Smart Phone	C	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Spy Who Defragged Me, The	M	Humor, Suspense	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Stacked	R	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Stocking Stuffers	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Forced	-
Super Blonde	C	Superhero	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Super Geek	C	Superhero	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Sylphi the Demon Girl	R	Supernatural	Male to Female	Forced	-
That’s No Lady	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
They Could Use a Good Shrink	R	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Forced	-
Trading Spaces	R	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Triumph of Dr. Aloysius Phigbert, The	C	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Ultimate Guide to Demons, The	C	Supernatural	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Underneath the Lamppost	C	N/A	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Valentine’s Date	C	Humor	Male to Female	Forced	-
Vampire	R	Supernatural	Male to Female	Forced	-
Vladimir Undergoes a Change	R	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Voluptuous	C	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Voodoo Queen	R	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Wash That Man	C	Simple TF	Female to Male	Spontaneous	-
Weary Wallflower	C	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-

**Table A3: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Sequences” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/sequences/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Were-Neko	R	Supernatural	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
What Goes Around...	C	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	Same-Sex Attracted Woman
What the Fugly?	R	Magic	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Why Would You...?	C	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Wizard 2 Wench(es)	R	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Woo Woo	C	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Working Out	R	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Woxie	C	Simple TF	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Zone of Absolute Transformation	M	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-

**Table A4: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Story Panels”**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/story-panels/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Alien Wife	M	Science Fiction	Male to Female, Female to Male	Forced	-
DNAItered		Science Fiction	Male to Female	Forced	-
Girlie Bomb, The	C	Supernatural	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Gun Moll	R	Crime	Male to Female	Voluntary	Same-Sex Attracted Man
Harry, Venus Hunter	R	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Forced	-



**Table A4: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Story Panels” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/story-panels/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Hyperverse: Black Arrow	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Forced	-
Hyperverse: Candy Marbles	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Hyperverse: Dash	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Forced	-
Hyperverse: Golden Gloves	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Forced	-
Hyperverse: Hyperman	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Forced	-
Hyperverse: Justice Legion	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Forced	-
Hyperverse: Justice Woman	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Forced	-
Hyperverse: Molecule Maid	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Forced	-
Hyperverse: Nightwoman	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Forced	-
Hyperverse: the Cute and the Curvy 74	R	Superhero	-	-	-
Hyperverse: The Pink Peregrine	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Forced	-
Hyperverse: Vigilante from Venus	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Forced	-
Hyperverse: Wet Dream	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Forced	-
Seer Coltz: Blonde Sexpot from Santa Monica	M	Erotic Romp, Science Fiction	Male to Female	Accidental	-

**Table A4: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Story Panels” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/story-panels/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Seer Coltz: Cursed of the Black Rose	M	Supernatural	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Seer Coltz: Kazammo!	M	Magic	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Seer Coltz: Locket of Love	M	Magic	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Seer Coltz: Not Pink Lemonade	M	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Seer Coltz: Powerful Chanting	M	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Seer Coltz: Right There	M	Erotic Romp	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Seer Coltz: Sweet Revenge	M	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Forced	-
Seer Coltz: The Hyde Syndrome	M	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Seer Coltz: White Girl	M	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Sturkwurk: After School Activities	M	Magic	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Sturkwurk: Boxer	M	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Sturkwurk: Brontosaurus	M	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Sturkwurk: Catcall	M	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Sturkwurk: Code 22	M	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Forced	Same-Sex Attracted Woman

**Table A4: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Story Panels” (Cont’d)**

Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/story-panels/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Sturkwurk: Detention	M	Magic	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Sturkwurk: Doll baby	M	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Forced	-
Sturkwurk: Dress Code	M	-	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Sturkwurk: Enlightenment	M	-	Male to Female	-	-
Sturkwurk: Extra Credit	M	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Sturkwurk: Femme-o-Matic	M	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Sturkwurk: Fund-Raising	M	Magic	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Sturkwurk: Go-Nads	M	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Voluntary	Bisexual Woman
Sturkwurk: Good News, Bad News	M	Magic	Male to Female	Forced	-
Sturkwurk: Goth House	M	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Sturkwurk: Hollywood Update	M	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Sturkwurk: Hotel Room Door	M	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Sturkwurk: Hypno	M	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Sturkwurk: Measuring Up	M	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-

**Table A4: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Story Panels” (Cont’d)**

Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/story-panels/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Sturkwurk: Paw Print	M	Magic	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Sturkwurk: Remember	M	-	Male to Female	Voluntary	Trans Woman, Same-Sex Attracted Woman
Sturkwurk: Rumble Seat	M	Magic	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Sturkwurk: Spellbook	M	Magic	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Sturkwurk: Sweet Proposal	M	Magic	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Sturkwurk: Waiting	M	-	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Sturkwurk: Winds of Change	M	Magic	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Sturkwurk: Witness Protection	M	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Sturkwurk: Follow Me	M	Magic	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Surprise!	R	Psychological	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Tebra: Beyond the Femzone 11	-	-	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Tebra: Cowboy Bride 86	-	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Tebra: Dr Bodyswitch 131	-	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Tebra: Dr Bodyswitch 132	-	-	Male to Female	-	-

**Table A4: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Story Panels” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/story-panels/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Tebra: Dr. Bodyswitch 128	-	-	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Tebra: Dr. Bodyswitch 130	-	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Tebra: Goodbye Charlie’s Angels 1	-	-	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Tebra: House of Change 1	-	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Tebra: House of Change 2	-	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Tebra: Mulligan’s Island 3	-	-	Male to Female	-	-
Tebra: Mulligan’s Island 2	-	-	Male to Female	-	-
Tebra: Strange Tails 183	-	-	Male to Female, Female to Male	Forced	-
Tebra: Strange Tails 187	-	-	Male to Female	-	-
Tebra: Strange Tales 176	-	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Tebra: Strange Tales 184	-	-	Male to Female	-	-
Tebra: Trans-Sex Files 23	-	-	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Tebra: Untold Tales of Tebra	-	-	Male to Female	-	-
Tebra: Wizards and Warriors 11	-	-	Male to Female, Female to Male	Forced	-

**Table A4: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Story Panels” (Cont’d)**

Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/story-panels/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Tebra: Wizards and Warriors 14	-	-	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Tebra: World’s Sexiest Comics 143	-	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
TG Fiction Classix: Drag Net	-	-	-	-	-
TG Fiction Classix: Fait Accompli	-	-	Male to Female	-	-
TG Fiction Classix: Happy Daze	-	-	Male to Female	-	-
TG Fiction Classix: Team Spirit	-	-	Male to Female	-	-
TG Fiction Classix: The Big Switch	-	-	Male to Female	-	-
What We Do for Love	R	Psychological, Romance	Male to Female	Voluntary	Same-Sex Attracted Man
Wonder World: Blockhouse	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Forced	-
Wonder World: Brickhouse	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Forced	-
Wonder World: Cobweb Kitten	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Wonder World: Debbie Deranged	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Voluntary	-

**Table A4: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Story Panels” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/story-panels/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Wonder World: Doctor Bedlam	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Wonder World: Jersey Devil	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Wonder World: Lady Loki	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Forced	-
Wonder World: Lummet	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Wonder World: Quantum Quartet	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Forced	-
Wonder World: Sea Witch	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Forced	-
Wonder World: Teen Queen & Beast of Burden	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Wonder World: The Little Lady	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Forced	-
Wonder World: Victory Gal	R	Superhero	Male to Female	Accidental	-

**Table A5: Superficial content of *The Watch* narratives**Available from [http://www.thewotch.com/?page\\_id=534](http://www.thewotch.com/?page_id=534)

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
A Girl And Her Blob	“PG-13”	-	-	-	-
Abra-Cat-Dabra	“PG-13”	-	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Accidental Watch	“PG-13”	-	Male to Female	Accidental, Forced	-

**Table A5: Superficial content of *The Wotch* narratives (Cont'd)**Available from [http://www.thewotch.com/?page\\_id=534](http://www.thewotch.com/?page_id=534)

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Adventures in Babysitting	"PG-13"	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Angelique the Defective Djinn	"PG-13"	-	Male to Female, Female to Male	Accidental	-
Comic Relief	"PG-13"	-	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Consequences	"PG-13"	-	-	-	-
D.O.L.L.Y.	"PG-13"	-	Male to Female, Female to Male	Forced	Trans Woman
Dancing Queen	"PG-13"	-	Male to Female, Female to Male	Accidental	-
Date Night... of Doom!	"PG-13"	-	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Days of Their Lives	"PG-13"	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Enter the Wotch	"PG-13"	-	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Enter the Wotch?	"PG-13"	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Moon over Tandy	"PG-13"	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Myths & Legends	"PG-13"	-	Male to Female, Female to Male	Accidental	-
Neighborhood Wotch	"PG-13"	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Now You See Her...	"PG-13"	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Revenge of Ishtar	"PG-13"	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
SchizophrANNEia	"PG-13"	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Slumber Party... of Doom!	"PG-13"	-	Male to Female, Female to Male	Forced	-
Something Wicked This Way Comes	"PG-13"	-	Male to Female	Forced	-



**Table A5: Superficial content of *The Wotch* narratives (Cont'd)**Available from [http://www.thewotch.com/?page\\_id=534](http://www.thewotch.com/?page_id=534)

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Split Screen	"PG-13"	-	-	-	-
War Stories	"PG-13"	-	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
What's My Age Again?	"PG-13"	-	Male to Female, Female to Male	Accidental, Forced	-

**Table A6: Superficial content of *The Wotch* "Fillers"**Available from [http://www.thewotch.com/?page\\_id=534](http://www.thewotch.com/?page_id=534)

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Accidental Wotch	"PG-13"	-	-	-	-
Blackmail	"PG-13"	-	-	-	-
Cheer One Shot	"PG-13"	-	-	-	-
Dog Sitting	"PG-13"	-	-	-	-
Dopey D&D Filler	"PG-13"	-	-	-	-
Facing the Past	"PG-13"	-	-	-	-
Glock and Tiel	"PG-13"	-	-	-	-
Good Will Hunting	"PG-13"	-	-	-	-
Jobs	"PG-13"	-	-	-	-
Just Curious	"PG-13"	-	-	-	Trans Man
Literally	"PG-13"	-	-	-	-
Little Swim	"PG-13"	-	-	-	-
Mentor, The	"PG-13"	-	-	-	-
Movie, The	"PG-13"	-	-	-	-
Ninja Wotch Wardrobe	"PG-13"	-	-	-	-
Observations	"PG-13"	-	-	-	-
Overheard Conversation	"PG-13"	-	-	-	-
Party, The	"PG-13"	-	-	-	-

**Table A6: Superficial content of *The Watch* “Fillers” (Cont’d)**Available from [http://www.thewotch.com/?page\\_id=534](http://www.thewotch.com/?page_id=534)

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Playground Defender	“PG-13”	-	-	-	-
Practice	“PG-13”	-	-	-	-
Soldiers and Pirates and Demons... Oh My!	“PG-13”	-	-	-	-
Speaking of the Past	“PG-13”	-	-	-	-
Two Guys Hanging Out	“PG-13”	-	-	-	-
Unnatural	“PG-13”	-	-	-	-
What Happened?	“PG-13”	-	-	-	-
Willpower	“PG-13”	-	-	-	-
Acclimating	“PG-13”	-	Female to Male	Forced	-
Birthday	“PG-13”	-	Male to Female	-	-
Chibi	“PG-13”	-	Male to Female	-	-
Time Travel	“PG-13”	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
What Are Friends For?	“PG-13”	-	Male to Female	-	-
Irene’s Timing	“PG-13”	-	Male to Female, Female to Male	Accidental	Trans Man
Originals, The	“PG-13”	-	Male to Female, Female to Male	Forced	-
Turned Upside Down	“PG-13”	-	Male to Female, Female to Male	Forced	-
Mall Curiosities	“PG-13”	-	Male to Female, Female to Male	Forced	-
Mind Swap Mayhem	“PG-13”	-	Male to Female, Female to Male	Accidental	-

**Table A7: Superficial content of *Siren Tales* and *Miss Mako* videos**Available from <https://www.youtube.com/user/MakoDap> unless noted

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
A Knight to Remember	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Addiction, The	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Banaba Idol, The	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Big Trouble in Little Jusenkyo	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Black Rabbit, The	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Bride at 1313 South Harbor Blvd., The	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Catalyst, The	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Company Dress Code, The	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Dead Men Tell No Tales	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Eleven <sup>10</sup>	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Fish Out Of Water	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Five Thieves, The	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Ghost in the Machine	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Got Milk?	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Accidental	Same-Sex Attracted Man
House Bunny, The	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Forced	-

<sup>10</sup> Available in truncated form only.

**Table A7: Superficial content of *Siren Tales* and *Miss Mako* videos (Cont'd)**Available from <https://www.youtube.com/user/MakoDap> unless noted

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
How I Met Your Mother	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Hunted, The	Safe for YouTube	-	-	-	
Hyde Syndrome, The	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Accidental, Voluntary	Bisexual Woman
Interview, The	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Accidental	-
It's All Greek To Me	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Kiss, The	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Lady of the House, The	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Voluntary	Trans Woman
Last Piece Standing, The	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Maid of Steel	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Man With The Black Hat, The	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Master and Servant	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Forced, Voluntary	Same-Sex Attracted Woman
Metamorphosis	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Moon Over Bourbon St	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Mother of the Gods	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Paradox Alice <sup>11</sup>	R	Science Fiction	Male to Female	Spontaneous	

<sup>11</sup> Available from <https://www.amazon.com/Paradox-Alice-Jeneta-St-Clair/dp/B00FWY5J6Y>

**Table A7: Superficial content of *Siren Tales* and *Miss Mako* videos (Cont'd)**Available from <https://www.youtube.com/user/MakoDap> unless noted

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Queen of the Dead	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Revenge, The	Safe for YouTube	-	-	-	-
Rules, The	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Voluntary	Questioning Masculinity
She Blinded Me With Science	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Siren, The	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Sleepless in Seattle	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Spontaneous	-
Trap, The	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
When Two Worlds Collide	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Wicked in the Woods	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Wish, The	Safe for YouTube		Male to Female	Accidental	-

**Table A8: Superficial content of *Three Degrees Off Center* videos**Available from <http://www.threedegreesoffcenter.net/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Hermione Granger's Amazing Polyjuice	Safe for YouTube	-	Female to Male	Voluntary	-
Becoming Wren Adams	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Voluntary	-

**Table A8: Superficial content of *Three Degrees Off Center* videos (Cont'd)**Available from <http://www.threedegreesoffcenter.net/>

TITLE	CONTENT RATING	GENRE	TRANSFORMATION SEX-SWAP	TRANSFORMATION AGENCY	LGBT CONTENT?
Cheerleader Body-Swap	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Cursed Water	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Game Over	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Hit Girl, The	-	Action, Adventure, Comedy	Male to Female	Accidental	-
Identity Theft	-	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Magic Hula Hoop, The	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Possession, The	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Roommates, The	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Forced	-
Wand of Change, The	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female	Voluntary	-
Super Morphing Super Heroes	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female, Female to Male	Voluntary	-
Body Swapper, The	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female, Female to Male	Voluntary	-
Magic Cane, The	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female, Female to Male	Voluntary	-
Transformer, The	Safe for YouTube	-	Male to Female, Female to Male	Voluntary, Forced	-

## APPENDIX B: DATA CODING - SOCIAL INVERSION

<b>Table B1: Social Inversion content in <i>TG Comics (and Stories)</i> "Comics"</b>		
Available from <a href="https://tgcomics.com/tgc/comics/">https://tgcomics.com/tgc/comics/</a> unless noted		
<b>TITLE</b>	<b>SYNOPSIS</b>	<b>SOCIAL INVERSION?</b>
Animus of Celena, The	A man is rejected by a woman at a party. He is possessed by a dead woman who turns his body into hers. The woman at the party then lets them in.	Rejected to Desired
Anniversary in Vegas	A man turns into a woman to satisfy his bisexual wife. They enjoy their new sex life so much they become strippers.	Restrained to Free
Assault, The	A group of scientists are turned into young women by aliens. They enjoy their new bodies and sex appeal while remaining scientists.	Restrained to Free
Bachelor Pad	An alien transforms a man into a woman so that they incubate alien children.	-
Beggars Can't Be Choosers	A man is fired from his job, then transforms into a woman and is hired by the same company for a better job.	Rejected to Desired
Best of Friends	A boy turns into a duplicate of a girl his friend has a crush on. The friend is overcome with desire and rapes them. They enjoy it so much they never turn back.	-
Bewitching Attraction	A male student has sex with his female biology teacher, which causes him to transform into a girl.	-
BFFs: Best Friends Forever <sup>12</sup>	A man facing long-term unemployment transforms into a woman whose sex appeal immediately gets them a high paying job.	Rejected to Desired
Bus Stop	A male clothing designer who loves women's clothing is transformed into a woman so they can enjoy wearing them.	Restrained to Free
Cheap Motel	A male nerd transforms into a woman and receives a lot of positive attention from other nerds.	Rejected to Desired
Chronos Medley	An unhappy man wishes for an easy life, so a genie transforms him into a sex worker.	Restrained to Free
CodeName: Agent Kitty	A male spy transforms themselves into a woman and uses their new sex appeal to get close to their target.	Rejected to Desired

<sup>12</sup> Available from <https://tgtony.deviantart.com/art/BFF-Best-Friends-Forever-Pt1-168406985>

<b>Table B1: Social Inversion content in <i>TG Comics (and Stories)</i> "Comics" (Cont'd)</b>		
Available from <a href="https://tgcomics.com/tgc/comics/">https://tgcomics.com/tgc/comics/</a> unless noted		
<b>TITLE</b>	<b>SYNOPSIS</b>	<b>SOCIAL INVERSION?</b>
Complex Eve	A man loses his job. He cross-dresses as a woman and is then hired for a new job.	Rejected to Desired
Daddy's Prom	An old man who has dedicated his life to his job is transformed into a young woman who starts their life over.	Restrained to Free
Date Game, The	Two male friends play a board game which transforms their bodies. They have sex as both men and women.	-
Demons in the Dark	A young man who is not allowed to study art is transformed into a woman and can start over.	Restrained to Free
Detective Darvy	A man transforms into a woman to infiltrate a brothel. They enjoy it so much they become a full time sex worker.	Restrained to Free
Devil's Playground	A demon transforms a man into a female demon.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Doki Doki Crossdressing Date	A man struggles with his attraction to a male cross-dresser. They ultimately have sex.	-
Eden	A young man enrolls in an academy that transforms all its male students into women.	-
Embracing Yin	A male archaeologist trespasses in an ancient ruin and is transformed into a woman as punishment.	-
Ex, The	A man and his girlfriend swap bodies to learn more about each other.	-
Fall of Nano, The	A male superhero is transformed into a woman and brainwashed.	-
Fantasy Spell	A man uses a spellbook to transform another man into a series of women who has sex with.	-
Fitting In	A trans woman takes a breast enhancement drug.	-
Fool's Jewel 1	A man is cursed to transform into a woman with an uncontrollable sex drive.	-
Fool's Jewel 2	Continuation of the above.	-
Fool's Jewel 3	Continuation of the above.	-
Fun with Units	Two young men use a machine to transform their bodies and play our sexual fantasies.	-



**Table B1: Social Inversion content in *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Comics” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/comics/> unless noted

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
Gallery, The	A man’s opinions about art are ignored because he is a man. He is transformed into a woman whose opinions are taken seriously.	Rejected to Desired
Girl Can’t Help It, The	A virus transforms people so they have male primary sexual characteristics and female secondary sexual characteristics.	-
Girl In My Dream	A girl that a boy has a crush on dies, and he begins to transform into her.	-
Gypsy’s Curse, The	A man is cursed and becomes a woman.	-
Hanover Tales	A group of scientists turn themselves into women and enjoy their new sex appeal.	Restrained to Free
Hard-Core Slacker	A bored male office worker turns into a woman and uses their sex appeal to control men.	Rejected to Desired
Hot Date, The	A man transforms into a duplicate of his male friend’s girlfriend. The friend rapes them.	-
I’m A Girl Now!	A man wakes up with no memory and discovers they have transformed into a woman. They go shopping.	-
Incompatible	Two man transform into women.	-
Infinite Stories 1	A man transforms into a woman. A man becomes a female demon. A heterosexual couple both change sex.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Infinite Stories 2	A man is turned into a woman and has sex with a male friend. A boy possesses his female neighbour and has sex with the boy’s male friends. A man turns into a female demon. Two men become women to access a nightclub.	Ordinary to Supernatural, Rejected to Desired
Last Penalty <sup>13</sup>	A violent male criminal is transformed into a woman as punishment. They escape and become an even more successful criminal by seducing men before robbing them.	Rejected to Desired
Marble Monkey, The	A statue curses two people; a man who becomes a woman, and a woman who grows a penis. They meet and become a couple.	-
Mask of Venus 1, The	A man dies and comes back to life in the body of the woman they longed for.	-
Mask of Venus 2, The	Continuation of the above.	-

<sup>13</sup> Available at <https://e-hentai.org/g/415588/f406bcfae9/>

**Table B1: Social Inversion content in *TG Comics (and Stories)* "Comics" (Cont'd)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/comics/> unless noted

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
Mask of Venus 3, The	Continuation of the above.	-
Merry Gift, A	A man is turned into a woman and has sex with a male friend. The male friend then transforms into a woman and they have sex again.	-
Mirror's Cycle	A man slowly transforms into a woman, then learns to accept and enjoy it.	-
Mukowski, P.I.	A male detective transforms himself into a woman to spy on a criminal. It is so enjoyable they become a woman full time.	Restrained to Free
Narcissus Twin	A man who is unpopular because of his narcissism becomes a woman whose narcissism is encouraged.	Rejected to Desired
Novaderm	A closeted trans woman has her body transformed to help her pass. She navigates sex with a straight man who is unaware she is trans.	Rejected to Desired
One Hell Of A Night!	A man whose life is going nowhere is transformed into a woman, and enters into a relationship with their male best friend.	-
Opposite Effect <sup>14</sup>	A man is dumped by his girlfriend and transforms into a woman. They become a model and enter into a relationship with a male photographer.	Rejected to Desired
Payback Possession	A man is fired by his female boss. He dies and his ghost possesses her body. They are sold into sex slavery and discover it is so pleasurable they never want to change back.	Restrained to Free
Playing the Part	A middle-aged man who hates his life is killed, and his ghost inhabits the body of a woman who was about to get married. Life is easier, so they elect to say as her.	Restrained to Free
Reign of Cruella	A male wizard and his two male henchmen steal the bodies of a princess and her two handmaids in order to take over a kingdom.	Rejected to Desired
Second Chance, A	A married man and woman who never had a fulfilling sex life change sex to reignite their marriage. The husband, now a young woman, is thankful for the opportunity.	Restrained to Free

<sup>14</sup> No longer available.

**Table B1: Social Inversion content in *TG Comics (and Stories)* "Comics" (Cont'd)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/comics/> unless noted

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
Speed Date	A young man with low self-esteem goes on a speed date. The woman he is matched with turns him into a woman, and their new body makes them gain self-confidence.	Rejected to Desired
Spirit of Christmas	A selfish man is transformed into a woman and cannot turn back until they have done good deeds over Christmas.	Rejected to Desired
Taboo Beauty	A man is cursed to become a woman whose body changes into whatever an onlooker desires.	-
Tales from the Butterfly Salon	The Butterfly Salon is a college where troublesome boys are sent and transformed into obedient girls.	-
The Werewif	A man who cannot get a date is cursed to become a woman every full moon, which he and his friends struggle to cope with.	-
The Wish	A man's male friend transforms him into a series of women. When transformed, they realise they can get men to do whatever they want	Rejected to Desired
Time to Kill	A man uses a machine to create a copy of his wife to have sex with. Later that day he kills her and transforms into a copy of her, planning to enjoy her life more than she did.	-
Touched by the Hand of God	A man is cursed to transform every night into a female vampire with an uncontrollable libido and bloodlust.	Ordinary to Supernatural
TS, I Love You	A man falls for a male cross-dresser. They have sex and wonder how they will navigate dating, with the cross-dresser not wanting to identify as a woman.	-
Video Game, The	Two male friends play a video game that transforms them, one into a muscular male athlete, and the other into a beautiful woman. The one transformed into a woman admits liking it more, and they become a couple.	-
Vixodus	An unpopular, bullied boy transforms into a voluptuous female superhero, and is lusted after by the bullies who loathed them.	Rejected to Desired, Ordinary to Supernatural
When the Right Man Comes Along	A woman is murdered by her abusive boyfriend. Her ghost then possesses her murderer, transforming him into her.	-

**Table B2: Social Inversion content in *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Vignettes”**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/vignettes/>

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
(G)irl	A man accidentally walks into a woman, who turns him into a woman as punishment.	-
44 Minutes til Midnight	An old male scientist turns into a young woman and discovers that a life of sex is more fulfilling than science.	Restrained to Free
A Halloween Affair	A boy wishes his mother had married someone other than his step father. The boy becomes a girl and his friend becomes his mother’s female partner. They all have sex.	-
After Conquest	An alien virus transforms men into women, who pass it on to men after sexual intercourse.	-
All a Girl Needs	A male bodybuilder makes a wish that turns them into a woman.	-
All My Love	A gay man in love with his heterosexual male best friend transforms into a woman so they can be together. The friend finds out and they break up.	-
Babe Note	A male school bully is transformed into a girl who is in love with their former victims.	-
Bloodhound, The	Two male journalists investigate a haunted building. A ghost there turns them into women who remain there.	-
Boys of Summer, The	Two male friends bet on which team will win a baseball game. The loser changes into a woman and has sex with the winner.	-
Chrysalis	A male fairy hides in a flower and is transformed into a female fairy.	-
Computers Never Lie...	A man joins a dating site, but there are no women matched with him. He is turned into a woman and matched with a man.	Rejected to Desired
Crafting a Witch	Two men trespass on a witch’s grave. One is transformed into the witch and the other becomes her cat.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Cure for Jealousy, The	A man who is jealous of his male friend’s dating success is transformed into his next girlfriend.	Rejected to Desired
Date, The	A man builds an artificial woman in a laboratory (no transformation)	-
Decision, The	A trans woman tries out an experimental drug to help her change her body.	-

**Table B2: Social Inversion content in *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Vignettes” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/vignettes/>

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
Didn't Your Mother Ever Tell You...	A man stares at pregnant women in public. He is transformed into one as punishment.	-
Double Date	Two men are using a dating website that lets them define their ideal woman. The site transforms them into each other's ideal.	-
Dr. Why – The Lost Season	An alien man called Dr. Why dies and is reincarnated as a woman.	-
Draco	A man transforms into a series of women to seduce a male business rival and learn of his plans.	Rejected to Desired
Empathy	A heterosexual couple trade bodies to learn how to please each other sexually.	-
Experimental Machine	A man agrees to help test a machine, which transforms him into a woman.	-
Festival	A male member of a hippie commune transforms into a woman. When the commune dissolves, they find the outside world harsher.	-
Freebie	A “TG” author has writer's block, so they transform themselves.	-
Heroic Comics: G-Girl – At What Price Victory?	A woman who was once a man enters a wrestling contest.	-
Heroic Comics: G-Girl at the Bat	A woman who was once a man plays baseball.	-
Heroic Comics: The Case of the Solicitor's Safe	A man opens a cursed safe and is transformed into a duplicate of Marilyn Munroe.	-
Heroic Comics: The Mystery of Sylph	A spirit takes over a man's body and transforms him into a woman.	-
Heroic Comics: The Mystery of Winter Wonderlass	A male superhero exchanges bodies with a female superhero.	-
Heroic Comics: The Unexpected	A male superhero is transformed into a teenage girl as a disguise, but they are stuck that way.	-

**Table B2: Social Inversion content in *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Vignettes” (Cont’d)**

Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/vignettes/>

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
Origin of Raven Gold		
Idol Worship	A trans woman discovers her musical idol is also a trans woman. They have sex.	-
Kannel: Easter Retribution	A man steals an Easter Egg and is transformed into a woman who is raped by the Easter Bunny.	-
Kittyhawk: Model	A man exchanges bodies with a female model and masturbates.	-
Kittyhawk: Out of Town	Two men take turns transforming into women and having sex with each other.	-
Lab Accident	Two middle-aged men who are in a combative relationship are turned into women. They have sex, then decided to begin new lives of shopping and clubbing.	Restrained to Free
Legs Goes Clubbin’	A man is turned into a woman while at a night club. They fall for a man they meet there.	-
Lollipop Guardian	A man becomes a female superhero.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Miss Mako: Eleven	A man transforms into a woman after answering the phone.	-
Miss Mako: The Addiction	A man becomes addicted to transforming into a woman at night.	-
Miss Mako: The Black Rabbit	A male spy is turned into a woman and tasked with seducing a target.	Rejected to Desired
Miss Mako: The Croft Legacy	An old man transforms himself into the protagonist of <i>Tomb Raider</i> .	-
Miss Mako: The Curse of Anahki	A man is cursed to become a female werewolf.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Miss Mako: The Fall of Camelot	An incompetent spy is transformed into a beautiful woman in order to seduce a king.	Rejected to Desired.
Miss Mako: The Hive	A man is transformed into a woman who is then transformed into a giant insect queen.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Miss Mako: The Kiss	A man is cursed to become a woman who transforms other men into women by kissing them.	Ordinary to Supernatural

**Table B2: Social Inversion content in *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Vignettes” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/vignettes/>

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
Miss Mako: The Siren	A man picks up an enchanted doll and becomes a mythological siren.	-
Miss Mako: The Witching Hour	A male priest who is burning witches alive is transformed into a new witch.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Miss Mako: Touched by the Hand of God	A man is cursed to transform every night into a female vampire with an uncontrollable libido and bloodlust. They eventually lose control and prey on men.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Miss-ter Universe	A group of male bodybuilders transform into women.	-
Mother Nature	A man logger is transformed into female nature spirit who protects the forest from other loggers.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Nothing But Fools	A man’s male friend transforms him into a woman as an April Fool’s Day prank.	-
Nu-Life 1	A male scientist overwrites their old stuffy male personality and body to become a flirtatious young woman.	Restrained to Free
Nu-Life 2	A male scientist become a series of different women using nanomachines.	-
Nu-Life 3	A male scientist becomes three identical women who have sex.	-
Nu-Life 4 – After Hours	A male scientist becomes two women the night before the conference. They have sex and decide to call off the conference.	-
Nu-Life 5 – The Employee Evaluation	A male scientist transforms themselves and their male boss into women who have sex rather than work.	-
Office Downsizing	A man is demoted to secretarial work by his boss, who transforms him into a woman while doing so.	-
Pauper and the Princess, The	A boy swaps bodies with a princess. The princess becomes an adventurer, while the boy becomes the new princess and marries a knight.	-
Permanently Pregnant Princess P.I.	A man is captured by aliens resembling pregnant women and transformed into one of them. They escape and become a superhero.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Pizza Dude	A pizza delivery boy is transformed into a female prostitute.	-
Playoffs, The	A man loses a bet with his male friend and becomes a woman to have sex with him.	-

**Table B2: Social Inversion content in *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Vignettes” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/vignettes/>

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
Poster Girl	A man sees a poster of a stripper and is sucked inside, becoming the image of her.	-
Rabbit’s Foot	Two young men who are being dominated by a local gang boss transform into women and become the gang boss’ sexual partners.	Rejected to Desired
Rescue of a Princess	A knight rescues a princess from a dragon, but is cursed and becomes a princess instead.	-
Rose, The	A young trans woman is upset that her body is not feminine looking enough. She pricks her finger on a rose and her body is transformed to be more feminine.	-
Santa Stops, The	Santa is delivering presents to a laboratory and a chemical spill turns him into a woman. Santa then turns the lab scientists into women as well.	-
Scenes from a Demonic Possession	A man is possessed by a female demon who transforms him into a woman and takes over his body.	-
Selling Candy	A man is selling candy door to door. He is told that customers are more likely to buy from a woman, so he turns into one.	Rejected to Desired
Simple Favors	A man who is failing a class is told he can get extra credit for drinking a strange liquid. It turns them into a woman who uses sex to get what they want.	Rejected to Desired
Sister Sins Fairy Tales	A man becomes a woman with supernatural powers who enters storybooks.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Spellbook of the Damned	A young man reads from a magic book, which turns him into a female vampire. They are overcome with bloodlust and kill their male best friend, then vow to exist only for pleasure.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Spraypaint	Before they go out clubbing, a group of male friends use magic spraypaint to turn themselves into women. One is left out and feels jealous until they transform him too.	Restrained to Free
Sunday in the Park with Peri	A socially awkward young man who is in love with his best friend’s girlfriend transforms into a woman who she is attracted to. The three of them enter a polyamorous relationship.	Rejected to Desired



<b>Table B2: Social Inversion content in <i>TG Comics (and Stories)</i> “Vignettes” (Cont’d)</b>		
Available from <a href="https://tgcomics.com/tgc/vignettes/">https://tgcomics.com/tgc/vignettes/</a>		
<b>TITLE</b>	<b>SYNOPSIS</b>	<b>SOCIAL INVERSION?</b>
Switch	A man turns into a woman while swimming, and rushes home. At home, they transform back into a man. They are unsure if it was real or just a hallucination.	-
Temazcal	An overweight man is self-conscious about his body being seen. He turns into a beautiful woman who enjoys being stared at.	Rejected to Desired
Tonisha	A white man wants to impress a black woman. She gives him a magic tape that turns him into a black woman who understands rap.	Restrained to Free
Vampire’s Victim	A male vampire takes over a woman’s body as a disguise. The vampire is discovered and the female body is injected with a drug that renders the vampire totally submissive. They become a sex slave.	-
What If... Professor Black	A website turns a man into a woman.	-
What If... Secrets	A website turns a man into a woman.	-
Witchwood	A knight and his squire are hunting down a witch. She transforms them into women and plans to sell them into sex slavery	-

<b>Table B3: Superficial content of <i>TG Comics (and Stories)</i> “Sequences”</b>		
Available from <a href="https://tgcomics.com/tgc/sequences/">https://tgcomics.com/tgc/sequences/</a>		
<b>TITLE</b>	<b>SYNOPSIS</b>	<b>SOCIAL INVERSION?</b>
333,333	A man transforms into a woman.	-
500+ Kisses	A man is pulled inside a kissing booth where he is transformed into a woman who is then placed in the booth.	-
All Dressed Up	A man puts on prosthetics to make himself look female.	-
Atlass	A small, thin man is laughed at by the patrons of a gym. He transforms into a muscular woman who then out-performs them.	Rejected to Desired
Babe-barian Too, The	A male barbarian kills a goddess, and is transformed into a replacement goddess as punishment.	-
Babe-barian, The	A male barbarian rescues a woman, but she is really a male wizard in disguise, who transforms the barbarian into a woman.	-

**Table B3: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories) "Sequences" (Cont'd)***

Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/sequences/>

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
Baby Got Back (at Ya)	A man sexually harasses a female clothing store owner. She punishes him by transforming into a woman.	-
Band of Gold	A man picks up a discarded wedding ring, which transforms him into a bride.	-
Becoming	A man drinks a vial of blood and becomes a female vampire.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Beer Goggles	A man puts on "beer goggles" which transform his male friend into a woman when he looks at them.	-
Belt	A man transforms into a woman wearing a belt.	-
Belt 2	A man transforms into a woman wearing a belt.	-
BF 2 GF	A man who is "too sensitive to be a man" becomes a woman.	-
Big Rack	A man who thinks it is okay to leer at women with large breasts because they are more popular is transformed into a woman with large breasts as punishment.	-
Blue Babe	A man transforms into a female superhero with blue skin.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Bobby's Wish	A boy is jealous of his female friend and wishes he could be more like her. He is transformed into her.	-
Body Zipper	A man in a relationship with a woman transforms into woman. They both go out for coffee.	-
Bodybuilder	A male bodybuilder transforms into a woman.	-
Born on the Fourth of July	A man called Mr Fugly transforms himself into a woman to celebrate the fourth of July.	-
Bride, The	A man transforms into a bride.	-
Bubblegum	A man transforms into a woman chewing bubblegum.	-
Buff 2 Blob	A man is transformed into an overweight woman.	-
Buff2Babe	A muscular man transforms into a slender woman.	-
Built	A muscular man transforms into a slender woman.	-
Bust Stop	A man transforms into a woman while waiting for a bus.	-
Camera	A man is transformed into a woman when his photo is taken.	-
Center of Attention	Two men have a contest transforming themselves into different women in order to get the most attention.	Rejected to Desired
Champagne Wishes	A genie transforms two homeless men into rich women and three rich people into their staff.	-

**Table B3: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* "Sequences" (Cont'd)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/sequences/>

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
Change of Business	Faced with layoffs, a man transforms into a female sex worker as a new career.	-
Classy Goth Girl	A man transforms into a female goth.	-
Comic Book Babe	A man calls a phone sex line and talks to a woman who loves comic books. She transforms him into a woman, then appears in their bedroom and has sex with them.	-
Cosplay Contest, The	A man enters a costume contest by transforming himself into exact duplicates of female video game characters.	Rejected to Desired
Crimson and the Black, The	A mysterious liquid transforms a man into a woman.	-
Crossing the Street	Two men transform into women while crossing the street.	-
Crystal, The	A woman's crystal necklace transforms a man into a woman.	-
Dancing Queen	A man transforms into a woman in a ballgown.	-
Dandeman	A man transforms into a woman.	-
Darvy	A man transforms into a woman in order to get into a nightclub.	Rejected to Desired
Death of Eric Smith, The	A man contemplates suicide because he is so lonely, but then transforms into a woman who is instantly popular.	Rejected to Desired
Death Wears a Thong	A man buys a Halloween costume which transforms him into a woman.	-
Deconstruction of Kyle, The	A man transforms into a woman.	-
Development	A man transforms into a woman.	-
Doctor Jeekyll and Nurse Hyde	A man drinks a liquid that transforms him into a woman.	-
Double-D Dragon	A man transforms into a woman.	-
Drag Queen	A man is sold a cursed bracelet that transforms him into a woman.	-
Dream Dance	A sad man "loses himself" in a song and becomes a happy woman, but then realises it was a daydream.	Restrained to Free
Dress	A man transforms into a woman.	-
Dress 2	A man transforms into a woman.	-
Duel, The	A male wizard and a female witch transform each other into young women. They have sex and then open a strip club.	Restrained to Free

**Table B3: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Sequences” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/sequences/>

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
Evil Angel	A male angel becomes a female devil.	-
Evolution of Nick, The	A man becomes a woman.	-
Experiment, The	A trans woman takes a drug to change her body. It does, even though it was a placebo.	-
Fanboy	An overweight man becomes a slim female superhero to escape from his fat body.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Farhad’s Cosplay	A man becomes a woman.	-
Fashion Pill	A man takes a pill that transforms him into a woman.	-
Femme Noir	A man reading a noir novel transforms into a femme fatale.	-
Femmed Fatale	A bullied schoolboy transforms into a girl that their former bullies now lust after.	Rejected to Desired
Finding the Right Look	A man transforms into a series of different women.	-
First Person POV	A man wakes up in a woman’s body and looks in the mirror.	-
Fortune Cookie	A man opens a fortune cookie which turns him into a woman.	-
Freckles	A man cross-dresses.	-
Free Date – Restrictions Apply...	A man is promised a free date. He doesn’t get one. A machine then turns him into a woman and they date a man.	Rejected to Desired
Friend with Benefits	A man transforms into a woman to go on a date with their male friend.	-
Friends	Two men turn into women.	-
Friends 2	Two men turn into women.	-
Gangsta Wannabe	A young white man who wants to be a “gangsta” turns into a black woman.	-
Gender Bent	A man involved in archery turns into a woman.	-
Genie Dance, The	A man dances and turns into a genie.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Getting Some Tail	A man turns into a mermaid.	-
Gimme a T, Gimme an A	A cheerleader turns a creepy man into a woman. As a woman, they are more popular than the cheerleader.	Rejected to Desired

**Table B3: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* "Sequences" (Cont'd)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/sequences/>

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
Gloves Off	A man picks a dress for a woman. She turns him into a woman and makes them wear it.	-
Goblin's Day at the Beach, A	A male goblin turns into a female bikini model.	-
Goblin's Day Job, A	A male goblin turns into a female underwear model.	-
Goddess	A man transforms into a goddess.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Going Amazon	A man transforms into a muscular woman.	-
Gomy	A man transforms into a female fairy.	Ordinary to Supernatural
GOOALLL!	A man transforms into a woman.	-
Green with Envy	A woman transforms into a man.	-
Growing Gazangas	A man transforms into a woman.	-
Guy 2 Gal	A man transforms into a woman.	-
Guy 2 Goth	A man transforms into a female goth.	-
Guy 2 Spy	A male spy transforms into a female spy.	-
Gym Class Hero	A teenage boy wishes the girls in his gym class wore more revealing uniforms. He is transformed into a girl and made to wear one.	-
Gypsy Wagon, The	A man goes to see a fortune teller. She turns him into a woman who then becomes the girlfriend of a man.	-
Hair's the Thing	A man with a beard transforms into a woman and loses their beard.	-
Harry, Venus Hunter	A male secret agent is transformed into a woman to help them track down a target.	-
He's So Lucky She's a Star	A man becomes a female pop singer.	-
Heat Wave	A man transforms into a woman.	-
Hidden Redhead	A man turns into a woman with red hair.	-
I Do Feel Lucky	A man transforms into a woman.	-
Injection	A man is injected with something that transforms them into a woman.	-

**Table B3: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Sequences” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/sequences/>

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
It Happens	A man transforms into a woman.	-
It Worked!	A trans woman takes a drug to change her body.	-
Jewel on 34 <sup>th</sup> Street, A	Two men pick up a jewel that turns them both into women.	-
Jock Itch	A large male football player who wishes he were more feminine is transformed into an equally large woman.	-
Just One More Time	A trans woman uses magic to help transform her body, but uses too much and develops exaggerated proportions.	-
Kali-Fornication	A man ogles a statue of Aphrodite in a museum. The goddess Kali is angered and transforms him into a woman with four arms.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Knight of the Succubus	A male knight rescues a princess from a male demon. The knight then becomes a succubus. The succubus turns the demon into a woman and keeps both the princess and the demon as sex slaves.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Lady of the Lake	A man transforms into a woman in a lake.	-
Leather	A man transforms into a woman.	-
Light Reading	A man is transformed into a woman while reading a book.	-
Little Fairy, A	A man is transformed into a female fairy.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Little Miss Fortune	A man falls out of a window and transforms into a woman on the way down.	-
Little Nathaniel	A man transforms into a woman.	-
Luck Be a Lady Tonight	A man transforms into a woman.	-
M2F	A man transforms into a woman.	-
Mask Effect	A man uses a mask to become a woman who then attracts a huge amount of attention.	Rejected to Desired
Match Game	A man and woman take turns transforming into different women. They then go shopping and have sex.	Restrained to Free
Mechanic, The	A man transforms into a woman.	-
Men’s Room	A man transforms into a woman and urinates.	-
Military Maternity	A male soldier and his pregnant female partner both change sex.	-

**Table B3: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Sequences” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/sequences/>

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
Miss Mako: Paradox Alice	A man transforms into a woman and is then cornered by two other men.	-
Miss-tletoe	A man turns into a woman.	-
Mistletoe	Two men transform into women.	-
Morning	A man transforms into a woman.	-
Morning 2	A man transforms into a woman.	-
Morph	A man transforms into a woman.	-
Morphinator, The	An old male scientist uses a machine to transform himself into a female bikini model, who becomes famous.	Restrained to Free
Mr./Mrs. Mako	A man transforms into a woman.	-
Narcissus	A woman transforms her boyfriend into a duplicate of her. They have sex.	-
Narcissus 2	A woman transforms her boyfriend into a duplicate of her. They have sex.	-
New Dish, A	A man transforms into a woman.	-
New Shoes for Julian	A man transforms into a woman while falling from a window.	-
New Shoes for Julian (Revisited)	A man transforms into a woman while falling from a window.	-
New Suit, A	A man transforms into a woman.	-
No Fat Chicks	A man wearing a “no fat chicks” t-shirt is transformed into a fat woman as punishment.	-
Not So Cocky Now	A man mistakenly believes he is desirable to all women. He is transformed into a woman who is truly desired by everyone.	Rejected to Desired
Now You’re Cooking	A man turns into a woman.	-
Nu-You Skin	A man uses an artificial skin to become a woman.	-
On The Pill	A man takes a pill and transforms into a woman.	-
One Bite of the Apple	A man is given an apple which transforms him into a woman. Another man then approaches and they fall in love.	-
One Fugly Beach	Mr Fugly transforms himself into multiple women at the beach.	-
OnNa: Dire Girl	A man transforms into a stereotypical anime heroine.	-
OnNa: Morning Glory	A man transforms into a woman.	-

**Table B3: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Sequences” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/sequences/>

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
Out for a Jog	A man transforms into a woman while jogging.	-
Over Femme	A man is transformed into a woman by a strange machine.	-
Pageant, The	A man enters a beauty pageant, so the organisers turn him into a woman.	Rejected to Desired
Party Girl	A man transforms into a woman so he can go to a party.	Restrained to Free
Party Girl 2	A man transforms into a woman so he can go to a party.	Restrained to Free
Pelvis	A man transforms into a woman.	-
Pixie Dust	A pixie turns a man into a woman.	-
Porn Star Is Born, A	A woman catches her male partner watching pornography. She transforms him into the woman from the pornography he was watching as punishment. They both have sex.	-
Pornstache Gone Wrong	A man turns into a woman.	-
Probing Dilemma, A	A man is abducted by aliens and transformed into a woman.	-
Rave New World	A man is now allowed into a nightclub that only admits women. He transforms into a woman who is granted access.	Rejected to Desired
Reluctant Pin-up, The	A man is transformed into a woman.	-
Remote Wars	A man uses a magic remote control to transform his Asian wife so that she is no longer Asian and has larger breasts. She takes the remote away and turns him into a woman.	-
Repayment Plan	A man cannot afford to pay a debt to a crime boss, so he is transformed into the crime boss’ female sex slave.	-
Return of the Boob Fairy	A fairy casts a spell on a man that makes him into a woman.	-
Return of the Tank Guy	A man casts a spell that will transform a man into a woman, but it is reflected	-
Ring, The	A man finds a ring that transforms him into the queen of an ancient civilisation, complete with throne and servants.	-
Rock Star	A man turns into a woman.	-
Running	A man is transformed into a woman while running.	-
Sex Swap	A heterosexual couple both change sex.	-



**Table B3: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Sequences” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/sequences/>

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
She-Wolf of Suburbia, The	A man with a small pet dog turns into a woman with a pet wolf.	-
Silver Spin	A man transforms into a woman.	-
Simple Case of the Floozies, A	A man who leers at a sex worker is transformed into one and cannot wait to start their new job.	-
Skirt Chaser	A man leers at a woman and is transformed into a woman as punishment.	-
Smart Phone	A man is transformed into a woman.	-
Spy Who Defragged Me, The	A male spy is transformed into a woman in order to seduce a male target. They have sex. The spy is stuck as a woman.	Rejected to Desired
Stacked	A man is transformed into a woman.	-
Stocking Stuffers	Two men get Christmas presents that transform them into women.	-
Super Blonde	A man’s secret identity is a female superhero.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Super Geek	A bullied boy’s secret identity is a female superhero that their bullies lust after.	Ordinary to Supernatural, Rejected to Desired
Sylphi the Demon Girl	A female demon transforms a man into a woman.	-
That’s No Lady	A man transforms himself into a woman.	-
They Could Use a Good Shrink	Three men turn each other into women using a magic remote control.	-
Trading Spaces	Two women transform a depressed man into a woman. The three become friends and go out drinking together.	Restrained to Free
Triumph of Dr. Aloysius Phigbert, The	An old male inventor whose business is failing invents a pill that transforms him into a young woman. They become so popular that the business is saved.	Rejected to Desired
Ultimate Guide to Demons, The	A man accidentally turns himself into a female demon, but is happy that they now have enough power to rule the world.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Underneath the Lamppost	A man transforms into a woman.	-

**Table B3: Superficial content of *TG Comics (and Stories)* “Sequences” (Cont’d)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/sequences/>

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
Valentine’s Date	A man goes to pick up his female date for Valentine’s Day. He is transformed into a woman and becomes the date of another man.	-
Vampire	A man is transformed into a female vampire.	-
Vladimir Undergoes a Change	A man is transformed into a woman.	-
Voluptuous	A man mocks his male friend over his weight. The male friend turns him into a voluptuous woman as punishment.	-
Voodoo Queen	Two men try to mug a woman, but she uses voodoo magic to turn them into women.	-
Wash That Man	A woman transforms into a man.	-
Weary Wallflower	A man is tired of being unpopular, so he transforms himself into a women and becomes popular.	-
Were-Neko	A man transforms into a female cat-person under a full moon.	Ordinary to Supernatural
What Goes Around...	Two men transform into women. One is attracted to the other.	-
What the Fugly?	A man transforms into a series of women.	-
Why Would You...?	A woman tricks a man into putting on magic shoes which accidentally turn him into a woman.	-
Wizard 2 Wench(es)	A male wizard transforms himself into a series of women.	-
Woo Woo	A man transforms into a woman.	-
Working Out	A man buys a heavily reduced body suit that makes him into an overweight woman. After working out and losing the weight, they attract a man, get married, and start a family.	-
Woxie	A man transforms into a woman.	-
Zone of Absolute Transformation	A man is trapped in a strange parallel universe where he is transformed into a demon woman who becomes the sex slave of another demon woman.	Ordinary to Supernatural

**Table B4: Social Inversion content in *TG Comics (and Stories)* "Story Panels"**

Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/story-panels/>

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
Alien Wife	A man's nagging wife has her body stolen by an alien. He prefers the alien.	-
DNAItered	A male basketball player is transformed into a teenage girl.	-
Girlie Bomb, The	A bomb transforms men into women.	
Gun Moll	A spy has a talent for disguising himself as a woman and seducing men. One of the men is gay and cannot be seduced, and kills the spy.	Rejected to Desired
Harry, Venus Hunter	In a future where men and women are segregated, a male assassin becomes a woman in order to get close to a female target.	-
Hyperverse: Black Arrow	A liberal male superhero is transformed into a black woman and must decide he really thinks black women are his equals.	-
Hyperverse: Candy Marbles	A man's alter ego is "the world's ditziest babe".	-
Hyperverse: Dash	A male superhero becomes a female superhero whose power increases when naked.	-
Hyperverse: Golden Gloves	A male superhero is transformed into a woman who becomes sexually uninhibited when a command word is spoken.	-
Hyperverse: Hyperman	Hyperman, a male superhero, becomes "Hyperbimbo", a female superhero with extremely low intelligence.	-
Hyperverse: Justice Legion	The transformed superheroes discussed above form a team.	-
Hyperverse: Justice Woman	A male superhero is transformed into a woman and discovers they love being a dominatrix.	Restrained to Free
Hyperverse: Molecule Maid	A bigoted male superhero is transformed into a Spanish woman with a thick accent and forced to work as a maid.	-
Hyperverse: Nightwoman	A male superhero becomes a woman.	
Hyperverse: The Cute and the Curvy 74	No transformation shown.	-
Hyperverse: The Pink Peregrine	A male superhero is cursed to become a woman who is always hungry.	

**Table B4: Social Inversion content in *TG Comics (and Stories)* "Story Panels" (Cont'd)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/story-panels/>

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
Hyperverse: Vigilante from Venus	A male superhero is transformed into a teenage girl.	
Hyperverse: Wet Dream	A male superhero is cursed to become a woman who is a narcissist.	
Seer Coltz: Blonde Sexpot from Santa Monica	A man falls asleep watching pornography and becomes the woman in the pornography he is watching.	-
Seer Coltz: Cursed of the Black Rose	A man is cursed to become a female vampire by a video game.	-
Seer Coltz: Kazammo!	A man transforms into a duplicate of his male friend's girlfriend as part of a plan to break them up. His mind also becomes hers and there is no longer a plan to break them up.	-
Seer Coltz: Locket of Love	A man pays his male friend to transform into a duplicate of his girlfriend for the afternoon. He then brainwashes the friend and they have sex.	-
Seer Coltz: Not Pink Lemonade	A man turns into a duplicate of his best friend's girlfriend. Her personality overwhelms his and they have sex.	-
Seer Coltz: Powerful Chanting	A cult transforms a man into a woman.	-
Seer Coltz: Right There	A man uses a magic spell to transform into a woman to get into a club, but they are overwhelmed and have sex with a man instead.	-
Seer Coltz: Sweet Revenge	A man is turned into a woman by his wife as punishment for him ogling other women. They realise they can just ogle themselves now.	-
Seer Coltz: The Hyde Syndrome	A man tests a experimental formula on himself and becomes a woman.	-
Seer Coltz: White Girl	A black man is transformed into a white woman as punishment for disliking white people.	-

**Table B4: Social Inversion content in *TG Comics (and Stories)* "Story Panels" (Cont'd)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/story-panels/>

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
Sturkwurk: After School Activities	A male professor transforms himself into a woman to "have fun".	Restrained to Free
Sturkwurk: Boxer	A male boxer enters a boxing match where the loser is transformed into a woman. They lose.	-
Sturkwurk: Brontosaurus	A man crashes his plane on a strange island where he is transformed into a woman and chased by dinosaurs.	-
Sturkwurk: Catcall	A male construction worker catcalls a woman and is transformed into a woman as punishment.	-
Sturkwurk: Code 22	A man accidentally activates a strange machine that alters reality around him, turning him into a woman and trapping them in strange situations.	-
Sturkwurk: Detention	A male student is sent to detention for turning into a woman during class.	-
Sturkwurk: Doll baby	A man is transformed into a teenage girl. They seek revenge, but don't want to turn back because the sex is too good.	Restrained to Free
Sturkwurk: Dress Code	A male teacher transforms himself into a woman in very revealing clothing in order to argue in favour of a school dress code.	-
Sturkwurk: Enlightenment	A man who was transformed into a woman years ago finally masturbates and decides it feels too good to change back.	Restrained to Free
Sturkwurk: Extra Credit	Two male scientists transform themselves into women to see if "men who are transformed into women make exponentially better lovers than natural-born women".	Restrained to Free
Sturkwurk: Femme-o-Matic	A man transforms himself into a woman using a machine.	-
Sturkwurk: Fund-Raising	A male librarian transforms himself into a woman in order to help the library by making money selling sex.	Rejected to Desired
Sturkwurk: Go-Nads	A man's girlfriend leaves him for a woman. He transforms himself into a woman and the three of them have sex.	Bisexual Woman
Sturkwurk: Good News, Bad News	A male barbarian sets off to rescue captive women. He is transformed into a woman.	-
Sturkwurk: Goth House	A series of men enter a haunted house that transforms them into women.	-

**Table B4: Social Inversion content in *TG Comics (and Stories)* "Story Panels" (Cont'd)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/story-panels/>

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
Sturkwurk: Hollywood Update	A Hollywood actor is cursed to transform into a woman.	-
Sturkwurk: Hotel Room Door	A man uses a bodysuit to transform into a woman and prepares to have sex with a male friend.	-
Sturkwurk: Hypno	A man is transformed into a woman while hypnotised.	-
Sturkwurk: Measuring Up	A man ends up in the body of his best friend's female partner. They are incredibly attracted to their best friend.	-
Sturkwurk: Paw Print	A man tries to help out a sports team by transforming into a woman and cheering them on.	-
Sturkwurk: Remember	A trans woman's body is transformed by a dominatrix.	-
Sturkwurk: Rumble Seat	A man transforms into a woman and enjoys riding a motorcycle because the rumbling seat stimulates their genitals.	-
Sturkwurk: Spellbook	A man transforms into a woman using a spellbook, but loses it and cannot change back.	-
Sturkwurk: Sweet Proposal	A man moves into an apartment that is cursed to transform men into women.	-
Sturkwurk: Waiting	A man exchanges bodies with a woman, then she runs away, leaving him trapped as her.	-
Sturkwurk: Winds of Change	A man is transformed into a woman and finds that they are more alive and sensual than they were as a man.	Restrained to Free
Sturkwurk: Witness Protection	A man enters a witness protection program and becomes a woman.	-
Sturkwurk: Follow Me	A woman lures a man into a strange building by saying that she was also a man once and that being a woman is superior.	-
Surprise!	A man transforms himself into a duplicate of his female partner to see if she is having an affair.	-
Tebra: Beyond the Femzone 11	A male barbarian drinks a potion that turns him into a woman.	-
Tebra: Cowboy Bride 86	A man is forced to swap bodies with a young married woman.	-

**Table B4: Social Inversion content in *TG Comics (and Stories)* "Story Panels" (Cont'd)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/story-panels/>

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
Tebra: Dr. Bodyswitch 128	Three male sailors are transformed into young women.	-
Tebra: Dr. Bodyswitch 130	The brain of an male murderer is placed in the body of a young woman.	-
Tebra: Dr. Bodyswitch 131	A mad scientist switches the bodies of a family.	-
Tebra: Dr. Bodyswitch 132	A male private investigator becomes trapped in the body of a femme fatale.	-
Tebra: Goodbye Charlie's Angels 1	Three police officers are killed and reincarnated as women.	-
Tebra: House of Change 1	A man is transformed into a woman by his wife.	-
Tebra: House of Change 2	A male high school principal is transformed into a female maid.	-
Tebra: Mulligan's Island 2	Two men lost on an island transform into women.	-
Tebra: Mulligan's Island 3	Two men lost on an island transform into women.	-
Tebra: Strange Tales 176	A scientist who has his funding cut transforms the man who cut it into a woman and sends them to work as a stripper.	-
Tebra: Strange Tales 183	A fat, unpopular high school boy and an attractive goth woman swap bodies.	-
Tebra: Strange Tales 184	Albert Einstein's mind is sent into the body of a teenage girl.	-
Tebra: Strange Tales 187	A middle-aged man becomes a young female pop star.	-
Tebra: Trans-Sex Files 23	A man and a woman exchange bodies.	-
Tebra: Untold Tales of Tebra	An adult man is transformed into a young woman.	-
Tebra: Wizards and Warriors 11	A man and a woman swap bodies. The man learns that being submissive is pleasurable now that they are female.	Restrained to Free

**Table B4: Social Inversion content in *TG Comics (and Stories)* "Story Panels" (Cont'd)**Available from <https://tgcomics.com/tgc/story-panels/>

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
Tebra: Wizards and Warriors 14	A wizard accidentally transforms himself into a woman.	-
Tebra: World's Sexiest Comics 143	A heterosexual couple swap bodies.	-
TG Fiction Classix: Drag Net	A man is transformed into a woman.	-
TG Fiction Classix: Fait Accompli	A middle-aged man is transformed into a teenage girl.	-
TG Fiction Classix: Happy Daze	A man is transformed into a woman.	-
TG Fiction Classix: Team Spirit	A male football player is transformed into a female cheerleader.	-
TG Fiction Classix: The Big Switch	A racist white male politician is transformed into a black woman.	-
What We Do for Love	A man transforms himself into a woman in order to be with another man.	-
Wonder World: Blockhouse	A male superhero and a female spy swap bodies.	-
Wonder World: Brickhouse	A white male superhero is transformed into a Japanese woman. They are now more effective because nobody suspects them.	Rejected to Desired
Wonder World: Cobweb Kitten	A male superhero accidentally becomes a woman.	-
Wonder World: Debbie Deranged	A male superhero dies and comes back to life in the body of a teenage girl, but she has minor brain damage and they cannot control their powers.	-
Wonder World: Doctor Bedlam	A male superhero accidentally exchanges bodies with a woman.	-
Wonder World: Jersey Devil	A grim male superhero becomes a young woman and discovers it is easier to have fun.	Restrained to Free



<b>Table B4: Social Inversion content in <i>TG Comics (and Stories)</i> "Story Panels" (Cont'd)</b>		
Available from <a href="https://tgcomics.com/tgc/story-panels/">https://tgcomics.com/tgc/story-panels/</a>		
<b>TITLE</b>	<b>SYNOPSIS</b>	<b>SOCIAL INVERSION?</b>
Wonder World: Lady Loki	A male superhero is transformed into a woman who has sex with her male opponents.	-
Wonder World: Lummet	A male superhero accidentally transforms himself into a woman, becoming both sexier and more intelligent.	Restrained to Free
Wonder World: Quantum Quartet	A team of male superheroes are transformed into women.	-
Wonder World: Sea Witch	A male superhero becomes a mischievous teenage girl.	-
Wonder World: Teen Queen & Breast of Burden	Two men are transformed into women.	-
Wonder World: The Little Lady	A sexist man is transformed into a woman who becomes flirtatious and sexy as punishment.	Restrained to Free
Wonder World: Victory Gal	"Victory Gal" is a title passed down among a series of men who are transformed into female superheroes.	Ordinary to Supernatural

<b>Table B5: Social Inversion content in <i>The Watch</i> narratives</b>		
Available from <a href="http://www.thewotch.com/?page_id=534">http://www.thewotch.com/?page_id=534</a>		
<b>TITLE</b>	<b>SYNOPSIS</b>	<b>SOCIAL INVERSION?</b>
A Girl And Her Blob	The transformed teacher from "SchizofrANNEia" keeps a pet blob.	-
Abra-Cat-Dabra	The characters turn themselves into animals. Evan returns.	Restrained to Free
Accidental Wotch	The characters are sent to a fantasy world. Jason becomes a female centaur for no reason.	-
Adventures in Babysitting	A spell goes awry and transforms female children into grown women and teenage boys into young girls. Anne remains female because Wotches cannot be male.	Rejected to Desired, Restrained to Free, Ordinary to Supernatural
Angelique the Defective Djinn	A genie is brought to school and grants wishes. A male teacher is transformed into a woman in a revealing dress so that their all-male class pay attention. James and Irene, a couple, swap	Rejected to Desired, Restrained to Free

**Table B5: Social Inversion content in *The Watch* narratives (Cont'd)**

Available from [http://www.thewotch.com/?page\\_id=534](http://www.thewotch.com/?page_id=534)

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
	bodies. Robin is turned into a girl with low intelligence who loves boys and shopping.	
Comic Relief	The characters all turn into superheroes. Jason accidentally turns himself into a female superhero he lusts after.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Consequences	The transformed characters from “SchizofrANNEia” all prefer being women.	Rejected to Desired, Restrained to Free
D.O.L.L.Y.	Jason turns into a girl to go shopping because it’s more fun for girls. A group of radical feminists transform men into women to help eliminate men from the Earth.	Restrained to Free
Dancing Queen	Everyone at the school dance gets their sexes swapped, but think it is cool and keep dancing. Anne casts an illusion to make her look like a boy because the magic will not affect her. Everyone thinks it was “fun”.	Restrained to Free (Both ways!)
Date Night... of Doom!	Jason wants to go to the movies. He transforms himself into a woman so that a man buys the tickets and treats them like royalty.	Rejected to Desired
Days of Their Lives	No transformations.	-
Enter the Wotch	Anne, Robin and Jason are introduced. Anne’s brother, Evan, asks to be turned into a young girl, Lily, after work to help him relax.	Restrained to Free
Enter the Wotch?	The power of The Wotch is handed down from master to apprentice. Only women can wield it, with male inheritors becoming women.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Moon over Tandy	A werewolf story. Robin & Jason are turned into girls for no reason.	-
Myths & Legends	Everyone in town transforms into mythical creatures. The male teacher who was transformed in “SchizofrANNEia” transforms again, this time into a siren who lures men towards them. Jason becomes a female faun who lusts after men. James and Irene swap bodies again.	Rejected to Desired, Ordinary to Supernatural
Neighborhood Wotch	No transformations.	-

<b>Table B5: Social Inversion content in <i>The Watch</i> narratives (Cont'd)</b>		
Available from <a href="http://www.thewotch.com/?page_id=534">http://www.thewotch.com/?page_id=534</a>		
<b>TITLE</b>	<b>SYNOPSIS</b>	<b>SOCIAL INVERSION?</b>
Now You See Her...	Anne's tutor transforms two boys into girls as punishment for spying on her.	-
Revenge of Isharru	The characters go to the world of genies. Jason is turned into a harm girl as a disguise.	-
SchizophrANNEia	Anne's powers run haywire. A clone of Anne transforms a middle-aged male teacher into a teenage Asian girl, and they are happier that way. A clone also turns four bullying football players into girls, who are also happier and better able to express themselves	Restrained to Free
Slumber Party... of Doom!	Anne and her female friends accidentally summon a monster during a slumber party. James and Irene swap bodies again. Robin and Jason are turned into girls for spying on the slumber party.	-
Something Wicked This Way Comes	A male wizard transforms a male janitor into a young woman to be part of the wizard's entourage. The janitor prefers it because it's easier and more fun. Robin and Jason also transform into girls to go shopping because it's more fun.	Restrained to Free
Split Screen	Jason goes shopping for clothing to wear next time he is a girl, and also picks up a series of sexy photographs of his female self.	Restrained to Free
The MOST Most Dangerous Game	No transformations.	-
War Stories	A story about mythical creatures fighting. The villain can change sex at will.	-
What's My Age Again?	Evan loses control of his transformation. In the margins of the comic, Robin and Jason become girls in revealing clothing because it is "more fun".	Restrained to Free

<b>Table B6: Social Inversion content in <i>The Watch</i> "Fillers"</b>		
Available from <a href="http://www.thewotch.com/?page_id=534">http://www.thewotch.com/?page_id=534</a>		
<b>TITLE</b>	<b>SYNOPSIS</b>	<b>SOCIAL INVERSION?</b>
Accidental Watch	A monster who was transformed into a woman admires their new body in a mirror.	Restrained to Free
Acclimating	A boy who was turned into a girl tries to deal with it. They do not like it at all and are treated poorly.	-

**Table B6: Social Inversion content in *The Watch* "Fillers" (Con't)**Available from [http://www.thewotch.com/?page\\_id=534](http://www.thewotch.com/?page_id=534)

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
Birthday	Robin and Evan transform into little girls and have fun during a birthday party.	Restrained to Free
Blackmail	No transformation.	-
Cheer One Shot	No transformation.	-
Chibi	Jason transforms into a girl for no reason.	-
Dog Sitting	No transformation.	-
Dopey D&D Filler	Jason is depicted as a female role-playing game character.	-
Facing the Past	No transformation.	-
Glock and Tiel	No transformation.	-
Good Will Hunting	No transformation.	-
Irene's Timing	Irene grapples with the feeling that she might rather be a boy than a girl.	-
Jobs	No transformation.	-
Just Curious	Irene grapples with the feeling that she might rather be a boy than a girl.	-
Literally	No transformation.	-
Little Swim	No transformation.	-
Mall Curiosities	Jason goes to the mall as a girl. Wolfie and Katie, two girls, experiment with being boys there.	Restrained to Free
Mentor, The	No transformations.	-
Mind Swap Mayhem	Robin, Jason and Anne randomly exchange bodies.	-
Ninja Wotch Wardrobe	No transformations.	-
Observations	No transformations.	-
Originals, The	The first Wotch was a man who became a woman after taking on the title. A princess is also turned into a man.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Overheard Conversation	No transformations.	-
Playground Defender	No transformations.	-
Practice	No transformations.	-

<b>Table B6: Social Inversion content in <i>The Watch</i> "Fillers" (Con't)</b>		
Available from <a href="http://www.thewotch.com/?page_id=534">http://www.thewotch.com/?page_id=534</a>		
<b>TITLE</b>	<b>SYNOPSIS</b>	<b>SOCIAL INVERSION?</b>
Soldiers and Pirates and Demons... Oh My!	No transformations.	-
Speaking of the Past	No transformations.	-
The Movie	No transformations.	-
The Party	No transformations.	-
Time Travel	Anne, Robin and Jason visit various historical eras. Robin and Jason transform into girls depending on the era.	-
Turned Upside Down	Two friends who had their sexes changed by a spell try to deal with the situation. There are ups and downs, but they have each other.	-
Two Guys Hanging Out	No transformations.	-
Unnatural	No transformations.	-
What Are Friends For?	A male teacher has a dream where he is a woman who is popular with their students because of their sex appeal.	Rejected to Desired
What Happened?	Male bullies transformed into nice girls are enjoying their new lives.	Restrained to Free
Willpower	No transformations.	-

<b>Table B7: Social Inversion content in <i>Siren Tales</i> and <i>Miss Mako</i> videos (</b>		
Available from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/MakoDap">https://www.youtube.com/user/MakoDap</a> unless noted		
<b>TITLE</b>	<b>SYNOPSIS</b>	<b>SOCIAL INVERSION?</b>
A Knight to Remember	A prince is turned into a princess.	-
Addiction, The	A man becomes addicted to transforming into a woman because it is easier and more fun than being a man.	Rejected to Desired, Restrained to Free
Banaba Idol, The	An archaeologist finds an idol that turns him into a woman.	-
Big Trouble in Little Jusenkyo	A man is transformed into a woman. They don't want to change back, because being a woman is preferable.	Rejected to Desired

**Table B7: Social Inversion content in *Siren Tales* and *Miss Mako* videos (Cont'd)**Available from <https://www.youtube.com/user/MakoDap> unless noted

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
Black Rabbit, The	A white male paraplegic former spy is transformed into an able-bodied Chinese woman who must seduce a target with her looks.	Rejected to Desired
Bride at 1313 South Harbor Blvd., The	A man investigates a haunted house and is transformed into a woman.	-
Catalyst, The	A man is transformed into a woman in a scientific experiment.	-
Company Dress Code, The	A man gets to work for Santa, but is transformed into a woman.	-
Dead Men Tell No Tales	A boy is captured by a pirate. He is deemed too scrawny to row the oars, so he is transformed into a woman who seduces men on the pirate's behalf.	Rejected to Desired
Eleven <sup>15</sup>	A man visits a hotel and tries to leave without paying. He is turned into a sex worker who services the hotel's clients.	-
Fish Out Of Water	A merman becomes a mermaid.	-
Five Thieves, The	A white man sent to an "Asian" country is transformed into a sex-crazed snake-woman who can kill men with their venom during sex. They love being a woman because the sex is better.	Ordinary to Supernatural, Restrained to Free
Ghost in the Machine	A man is sucked inside a computer and transformed into a woman.	-
Got Milk?	A gay man becomes a woman accidentally, and gets a promotion at work because they are sexy. They then break up with their boyfriend to pursue an office romance.	Rejected to Desired
House Bunny, The	A man is transformed into a woman wearing bunny ears.	-
How I Met Your Mother	Four boys explore a pirate ship. Two of them are turned into girls. They then pair off into two couples.	-
Hunted, The	A mysterious woman is really a werewolf (no sex change).	
Hyde Syndrome, The	Over a series of days, a man transforms into a woman, realises it is preferable, becomes bisexual and makes money by flirting with men.	Rejected to Desired, Restrained to Free

<sup>15</sup> Available in truncated form only.

<b>Table B7: Social Inversion content in <i>Siren Tales</i> and <i>Miss Mako</i> videos (Cont'd)</b>		
Available from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/MakoDap">https://www.youtube.com/user/MakoDap</a> unless noted		
<b>TITLE</b>	<b>SYNOPSIS</b>	<b>SOCIAL INVERSION?</b>
Interview, The	A journalist tracks down a serial killer. They are a man by day and a female vampire by night.	Ordinary to Supernatural
It's All Greek To Me	A man is transformed into a duplicate of the goddess Aphrodite.	-
Kiss, The	A man is kissed by a strange woman, which causes him to transform into a woman.	-
Lady of the House, The	A man finds a mirror that says it will release the woman inside him. He agrees and is transformed into a rich woman who owns a huge house.	-
Last Piece Standing, The	After the world's women are killed off by a plague, a man is transformed into one to keep the species going.	-
Maid of Steel	A man who lives in a messy apartment transforms into a woman so they can clean it.	Restrained to Free
Man With The Black Hat, The	A man tests a drug on another man, transforming him into a woman.	-
Master and Servant	A man is transformed into a female genie. Another man wishes that he was also a woman so he could live out a lesbian fantasy. It becomes permanent and they go shopping.	Restrained to Free
Metamorphosis	A male servant is transformed into a woman. They marry a king and now have their own servants.	Rejected to Desired
Moon Over Bourbon St	A failed male musician wishes for success. He is transformed into an attractive woman who instantly develops a following.	Rejected to Desired
Mother of the Gods	A man falls into a river and becomes a woman.	-
Paradox Alice <sup>16</sup>	An aggressively masculine astronaut is transformed into a woman who learns to love and care for people.	Restrained to Free
Queen of the Dead	A man becomes a female vampire.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Revenge, The	No transformations.	-
Rules, The	A man transforms into a woman to see what it is like. When they fall pregnant, they wish to turn back, but can't.	Questioning Masculinity

<sup>16</sup> Available from <https://www.amazon.com/Paradox-Alice-Jeneta-St-Clair/dp/B00FWY5J6Y>

<b>Table B7: Social Inversion content in <i>Siren Tales</i> and <i>Miss Mako</i> videos (Cont'd)</b>		
Available from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/MakoDap">https://www.youtube.com/user/MakoDap</a> unless noted		
<b>TITLE</b>	<b>SYNOPSIS</b>	<b>SOCIAL INVERSION?</b>
She Blinded Me With Science	A male scientist who is sick of being mocked tries to transform his body, but ends up being a woman. As a woman, they are more popular, and become a stripper.	Rejected to Desired
Siren, The	A man becomes a mythological siren and kills their friend.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Sleepless in Seattle	A man transforms into a woman for no reason.	-
Trap, The	A male assassin is tracking down a female target. She transforms him into her duplicate to create a diversion.	-
When Two Worlds Collide	A man is transformed into a woman in order to get close to a man and spy on him.	Rejected to Desired
Wicked in the Woods	A man becomes a female werewolf.	Ordinary to Supernatural
Wish, The	A woman wishes people understood her better. Everyone in the world turns into her.	-

<b>Table B8: Social Inversion content in <i>Three Degrees Off Center</i> videos</b>		
Available from <a href="http://www.threedegreesoffcenter.net/">http://www.threedegreesoffcenter.net/</a>		
<b>TITLE</b>	<b>SYNOPSIS</b>	<b>SOCIAL INVERSION?</b>
Becoming Wren Adams	A man becomes a popular YouTube vlogger.	-
Cheerleader Body-Swap	Four people have their minds exchanged. A middle-aged teacher ends up in the body of a teenage girl and prefers the lack of stress.	Restrained to Free
Cursed Water	A man transforms into a woman, goes shopping and buys clothes.	Restrained to Free
Game Over	Two men play a video game and turn each other into video game characters, both male and female.	-
Hermione Granger's Amazing Polyjuice	A woman drinks a potion and transforms into a man.	-



**Table B8: Social Inversion content in *Three Degrees Off Center* videos (Cont'd)**Available from <http://www.threedegreesoffcenter.net/>

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	SOCIAL INVERSION?
Hit Girl, The	A middle-aged hitman who is out of touch with his emotions is transformed into a teenage girl and forms bonds for the first time.	Restrained to Free
Identity Theft	A man has his body stolen by a woman and works to get it back. They fail, but like being a woman anyway.	-
Magic Cane, The	A woman transforms herself into various people using a cane.	-
Magic Hula Hoop, The	A man uses a hula hoop to become a woman.	-
Possession, The	A woman runs over a man and kills him. His ghost possesses her body and has fun.	Restrained to Free
Roommates, The	A man makes a wish on a coin and turns his male roommate into a woman.	-
Super Morphing Super Heroes	Various superheroes transform into each other.	-
The Body Swapper	A man swaps bodies with his girlfriend and tries to live out a lesbian sexual fantasy. They also exchange bodies to cosplay.	-
Transformer, The	A remote control transforms people.	-
Wand of Change, The	A man uses a wand to transform into a woman he knows, and has fun at her house trying on clothing in the mirror.	Restrained to Free

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