

Transmen and the City

Gay guys who love ex-girls, and other Brooklyn permutations.

By [William Van Meter](#) Published May 15, 2010



(Photo: Allison Michael Orenstein)

Sipping coffee at Williamsburg's Variety café, Amos Mac looks like a typical hipster gay guy. His wispy boyish mustache and baby face belie his 30 years. His black hair is short on the sides with an unruly mass of curls on top. A large chest tattoo peeks out from his low-cut tank top: It reads identity.

Underneath it are two large pink scars, like half-moons, from his double mastectomy. Every ten to

fourteen days, Mac's roommate gives him a shot of prescribed testosterone, or "T," as it's known in FTM (female-to-male transsexual) parlance. He has no desire for any below-the-belt surgery; it's not necessary for him or anyone he dates.

Mac doesn't really see himself as a guy, but as a "transman," someone who started out female and then shifted to the masculine side of the gender spectrum. And yet Mac also identifies as a "queer guy," which means he often finds himself attracted to, and dating, gay men. He's an exemplar for a new generation less concerned with gender boundaries. "When I was a woman or girl or whatever," Mac says, "I very much identified as a fag. I was drawn to the community of gay men, and that's how I embody myself." And although he's dated women, "I'm attracted to guys who have a bit of flair to them. They don't have to be gay, but they can be queeny. I love an artistic queen."

Mac is the founder and editor of the quarterly 'zine *Original Plumbing*—he got the title from a term transmen employ to refer to their anatomy in Craigslist personals. "It's a very personal project," Mac says. "I wanted to give transmen a voice."

Transmen have always been out there, and many prefer women. But those who identify as gay men are becoming increasingly evident in New York, especially in the Brooklyn bars where they're helping raise the already high mustache quotient. Williamsburg's Metropolitan, in particular, counts many pool-playing transguys among its clientele, and they're not unheard of on gay hookup sites like Manhunt. "What I like about transmen is the same thing I like in other men," says 26-year-old law student Ben Riskin, who has gotten together with a few. "They're masculine and often very attractive. It's juvenile to have a fear of biological woman parts and this idea that they make the gender of a person. People are attracted to other people. Part of being young and queer is you don't

need to put yourself into boxes.”

“Growing up, something separated me from my female friends,” Mac says. “I was drawn to male clothes. I threw fits wearing dresses. But at the same time, I was really into boy bands. I wasn’t a typical man in a girl’s body. But I definitely didn’t feel like a girl.” Mac decided to transition genders about five years ago. “I felt less and less attached to my body and unable to be called ‘she’ or be seen as a girl or even a boyish woman. I tried for a long time not to transition and thought I could live comfortably as this gender-neutral person who didn’t need to change their body. I tried to work that angle, and then I couldn’t anymore.” Mac thinks that now, living as a queer man, he is actually more comfortable with his boy-band-loving femme side, as he no longer has to maintain a forced masculine posture in order to pass.

Mac moved to San Francisco from Brooklyn in 2008, returning to be a judge at the world’s first Mr. Transman competition recently at [the Knitting Factory](#).

There, the transmen looked like fellas and often sounded like queer-theory grad students. “I’m gender variant–transgenderish,” says Twiz, 28, a handsome, tough-looking punk-greaser type, who’s had “top surgery” but doesn’t take testosterone. “I don’t identify as male or female but a continuum of fluidity among both.” As the PBR flowed, things got rowdy as transmen wrestled and rapped onstage. Brooklynite Kit Yan did a knockout spoken-word performance in footie pajamas with a lollipop about how he’s a “smart sexy tranny boy for femme top dom to teach me etiquette lessons.” Yan won the title, along with a bag of sex toys and a contraption that allows transmen to pee standing up.