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## What the FTM?

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*Trans Men are rewriting the rules about what it means to be a queer and male. Next Magazine explores Masculinity at the crossroads of sexual orientation and gender identity*

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It's a cold Friday in March and I'm trudging out to Sugarland for a party. Original Plumbing, a quarterly magazine celebrating trans male culture, just published its second issue and the editors have flown in from San Francisco for an East Coast celebration. After warming up with a drink, I find myself jostling through a sea of flesh.

Usually, in a crowded gay club, guys are constantly sizing each other up. It can be thrilling, but intimidating too. Here, amid bio guys, female-to-male (FTM) trans men, male-to-females (MTFs), lesbians, gender queers and a few straights, that anxiety is diffused. At least that's my take on it.

"There was some cliquishness earlier in the night, when it was predominantly trans guys," says Daniel "Scout" Rose, a trans man and former Sugarland manager who helped pull the party together. "Sometimes your own community is your worst enemy," he jokes. "But when it got mixed later on it was just so much fun. There's none of that pressure." By the end of the night, the event had drawn 550 people—and those were just the ones who paid to get in.

It was one of the most diverse and unique gatherings I had been to in a long time.

Whereas my fellow gays and I have begun to slowly slide into the mainstream, there was an edge of electricity that night that I hadn't felt in years—a mix of excitement, confusion and even a little fear. A hot guy would catch your eye and you'd wonder, "Is he one, too?" Or maybe you'd get caught lusting after the wrong person. It hearkened back to a time when, as sexual outlaws, homosexual men had to write their own rules. So are trans men the new gays?

Amos Mac began publishing Original Plumbing with associate editor Rocco Kayiatos last fall, and even in an environment where print media is floundering, the magazine has grabbed a slice of the queer zeitgeist. "I was shooting photos of my trans guy friends and wanted to make a little zine out of it," he says. "We got excited and started talking more about it being a real magazine rather than just a little photocopied thing." For Mac, a printed journal had more substance than a blog and could be left as an artifact for future generations. "I like the idea that someone would undercover an issue of Original Plumbing in 100 or 1,000 years," he says. Rose discovered the magazine through a friend and invited Mac and Kayiatos to come east to promote the debut issue in the fall of 2009. That event also drew some 500 folks, well above the bar's usual Friday night numbers.

Before moving to the West Coast, Mac lived in New York from 2004 to 2008, though he says he didn't feel like there was much of a FTM community here. "That [impression] could've been about where I was in my life. Now when I come back I feel it. But I wasn't comfortable as a queer trans man then. It was all very anonymous—I didn't want to date guys, I just wanted to fuck them. I was hooking up with someone but he couldn't get the trans thing out of his

mind," he remembers.

A number of trans men admit that their attraction to bio guys—or at least their comfort with that attraction—emerged after they began taking testosterone. "Hormones are powerful shit," says Scout.

Buck Angel, the FTM porn star who famously bills himself as "the man with a pussy," spends a lot of time in the Big Apple's gay scene and says it's not so open to trans men. "I'm well known, so I get a lot of attention. But a lot of regular trans guys I talk to don't feel embraced by the gay community here. I've heard some say, 'They're shunning me. They find out I have a pussy and they run away.' And there are [bio guys] who write me e-mails like, 'I'm gay but I'm into this trans guy and I'm so confused. Am I straight?'" Given that homos have had to defend their own identity, Angel says, "It's incredible that gay [men] are so wound up about sexuality and gender."

That's not to say all trans men who are interested in biological guys have a hard road in the Big Apple. Rose started transitioning shortly before moving to New York and says he's had a fairly easy time of it here. "I just got out of a two-year relationship with a non-trans guy," he says. "I've never really had any problems," either dating or with the gay community in general. "I mean I can count on one hand the number of guys who've given me shit."

Like gay men, trans guys are not monochromatic in how they express their sexuality. There are tops, bottoms and those whose vaginas are off limits. Some are into women and others, like queer-studies pioneer Pat Califia, are attracted to other trans guys. And some are into biological guys. It's difficult to say how many trans guys are in New York, and even harder to get a fix on what percentage of them identify as gay (that is, that are into other guys). In the mid-2000s, the Boiler Room held Manhunt, a night catering to FTMs and interested bio dudes, but there hasn't really been a specific party scene since then. That's My Jam at the Bell House in Gowanus, Hey Queen at Sugarland (which Rose runs with fellow promoter Sierra), and the Spam underwear parties—all of which are in Brooklyn, not coincidentally—attract a fair number of trans men. And guys like Scout, Glenn Marla and That's My Jam co-producer Trent are active in the queer nightlife scene. There are also trans men working in downtown gay bars, but most don't wear neon signs advertising their gender identity.

Brooklyn cartoonist Bill Roundy has dated several trans men, though he remembers being a little thrown at first. "We were at a party and I was talking to this guy. I was like, 'He is totally hot.' Then my friend says, 'He's a chick.'" Roundy says being with an FTM wasn't something he thought about, though he "wondered if it was a possibility." He fictionalized the encounter in the Web-comic "Man Enough" (available at BillRoundy.com) and eventually realized there was no reason not to act on his attraction. How have Roundy's friends responded? "There have been different reactions—mostly just a little bit of gentle teasing from friends. But a few people were like, 'How could you do that?' And my straight friends are just fascinated. 'Doesn't that make you at least a little straight?'" Most definitely not, Roundy says. "I'm gay. I'm attracted to masculinity. In my mind, trans men are men."

The fact that a lot of trans men can "pass" makes visibility an issue, even within the LGBT community. Disclosing their gender status, whether to a potential romantic partner or to friends and coworkers, can be a daunting prospect. But with the bold visibility of Angel, the arrival of Original Plumbing, the media attention given to "pregnant man" Thomas Beatie and other cultural benchmarks, things seem to be changing. "I've seen an explosion in the last two years of men wanting to be with trans guys," says Angel. "I think I've opened the door to allow trans men to be honest about [their attraction] to gay guys and vice-versa. People are finally coming around and realizing that there's more to sex than what's between our legs."

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