of Asians as a “successful” minority. Insofar as a fraternity house booth inviting passers-by to “Slap a JAP” echoes the “Slap That Jap: Buy War Bonds” posters of World War II, it legitimizes anti-Semitism, misogyny, and anti-Asian racism simultaneously.

As the U.S. economy wavers, as American national identity itself wavers, anti-Semitism is one time-honored escape from critical thinking and political responsibility. Young Jewish women on college campuses may have received little in their education to help them interpret this double assault—especially since the “JAP” label can be applied to non-Jews as well. Some older Jewish women, too, as articles in both Lilith and New Directions for Women indicate, have reacted by accepting stereotyping, by suggesting that “We should be able to laugh at ourselves.” Both Jewish men and women tell “J.A.P.” jokes. But, according to Messing, “No one refers to herself as a JAP.” Francine Klagsbrun observes, “When we put down other Jewish women, that is a form of self-hatred.”

And yes, we do need to laugh at ourselves. But our humor cannot—for our own health—be founded on self-hatred. When we delight in ourselves as women, delight in ourselves as Jews, we can laugh out of the fullness of recognizing ourselves as necessarily flawed and sometimes ridiculous human beings. Our humor need not come out of the arsenal of those who would deny us our humanity.

**NOTE**

1. Thanks to Lilith: The Jewish Women’s Magazine, 250 W. 57th Street, New York, NY 10107; New Directions for Women, 108 Palisade Ave., Englewood, NJ 07631; the Chicago Jewish Sentinel, 323 S. Franklin St., Rm. 501, Chicago, IL 60606.

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**TO BE POOR AND TRANSGENDER**

Kai Wright

Sharmus has been a sex worker for about five years. She started after breaking up with a boyfriend who was supporting her while she was out of work. It was quick money, and, as with many of her transgender friends, she didn’t believe there were many other jobs out there for her.

You have your good nights, and your bad nights,” says Sharmus, thirty-five. “There are no fringe benefits. Summer time is the best time; the weather is hard,” she explains, casually ticking off the pros and cons of being a prostitute. “It’s just hard getting a job. Nobody really wants to hire you, and when they do hire you they give you a hard time.”

Sex work was not in her plans back when she transitioned from male to female at age twenty-one. “Sometimes I regret it,” she sighs. “My lifetime goal was to be a schoolteacher.”

Her uncertainty is to be expected. Our culture depicts people whose discomfort with gender norms goes beyond being tomboys or feminine men as mere curiosity items for trash TV (“Your woman is really a man!” episodes of Jerry Springer). This collective ignorance leaves people like Sharmus with little guidance. Many go through puberty and into adulthood without meeting people like themselves. The resulting high rates of depression, drug use, violence, and suicidal thoughts are unsurprising.

“One of the greatest agonies one can experience is gender dysphoria,” says transgender activist Jessica Xavier. “When your anatomy doesn’t match who you are inside, it’s the worst feeling in the world.”

Sharmus and Xavier are part of a group whose existence challenges normative gender. They include drag performers, heterosexual cross-dressers, and people from all walks of life who live permanently in a gender other than that assigned at birth. They range from individuals who have had thousands of dollars worth of reconstructive surgery to people who simply style themselves in a way that feels comfortable.

Around the nation, a growing cadre of activists is working to build bridges between all of these populations and to encourage the formation of an umbrella community called “transgender.” What the members of this latest American identity group share is a far more practical understanding of gender politics than that of the ethereal, academic world to which it is often relegated. From employment to health services, transgender folks, particularly those in low-income environments, face enormous barriers when navigating even the most basic aspects of life—all because of their gender transgressions.

“We continue to be one of the most stigmatized populations on the planet,” says Xavier, the former director of a national coalition of transgender political groups called It’s Time!—America. Xavier recently convened the local health department into financing a survey of around 250 transgender people in D.C. Forty percent of respondents had not finished high school, and another 40 percent were unemployed. Almost half had no health insurance and reported not seeing a physician regularly. A quarter reported being HIV-positive, and another 35 percent reported having seriously considered suicide.

Xavier’s was the latest in a series of such studies done in cities where relatively emblazoned trans activists have pushed local officials to begin considering public policy solutions to their health care concerns. Across the board, they have found largely the same thing: higher rates of just about every indicator of social and economic distress. “And all because of the stigma,” Xavier concludes.

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Kai Wright, “To Be Poor and Transgender” from The Progressive, 65(10). Reprinted with the permission of The Progressive magazine, 409 East Main Street, Madison, WI 53703.
One problem that stands out, Xavier and others say, is the need for accessible counseling and medical supervision for those who are in the process of gender transitioning. Most medical professionals require certain steps, outlined in a set of protocols dubbed the “Benjamin Standards of Care.” First, a therapist must diagnose you with “Gender Identity Disorder,” which the American Psychiatric Association established in 1979. In adults, the diagnosis essentially confirms that your “gender dysphoria” is profound enough that the drastic step of making physiological alterations to God’s plan is an acceptable treatment.

The diagnosis clears you for reconstructive surgery and hormone therapy. Hormone use for gender transitioning is strictly off-label, but select doctors will nevertheless prescribe a particular hormone and simply file paperwork for one of its approved usages. While there is disagreement within the trans community about how this process should be altered, most unite around frustration with the gatekeeping nature of it all—the notion that one must first ask permission, then be declared insane, before being allowed to violate our gender rules.

For Angela (a pseudonym), this means choosing between the career she’s spent ten years building and her recent decision to live as a male. Angela, twenty-eight, gained security clearance while serving in the Marines. Despite having climbed to officer rank, she fled the forces when it became clear they were going to throw her out for being a lesbian.

As a civilian, her clearance allowed her to land a well-paying job at an aerospace engineering firm. The position has afforded her partner of four years a comfortable life, and even occasionally helps support her partner’s budding acting career. But all of that will be jeopardized once a gender-identity-disorder diagnosis is placed in Angela’s medical records. Technically, it’s a mental health problem, and that would likely prompt the revocation of her clearance when it next comes up for review. So Angela and her partner are again searching for new ways she can use her skills.

Middle class professionals like Angela have options. The barriers to a legal and safe gender transition are surmountable, if profound. But for people like Sharmus, the whole discussion is absurd.

Sharmus has never had “body work” done, but she’s taken some hormones in the past. In her world, spending thousands of dollars on therapy, surgery, and hormone treatments is impossible, but a hyper-feminine appearance is still highly valued—not only for personal aesthetics, but also for professional development. So a thriving black market has developed. In D.C., for $200 to $300, you can have silicone injected into your chest to create breasts. Thirty bucks will get you around 100 hormone pills, though injections are usually cheaper.

“When I was taking the hormone shots, my girlfriend was shooting me,” Sharmus explains. “You get a knot in the breasts first, then your skin gets soft. After about two months, my breasts started forming.”

With hormones, often someone who has taken them before supplies and mentors a curious friend. Similar arrangements develop with silicone, but just as often there’s a dealer in town who also injects clients. The silicone is not encased, as it would be with an implant, but rather injected with large syringes directly into varying body parts. In some cases, the materials injected are not even silicone, but substitutes made from more readily available things such as dishwashing liquid or floor wax. Similarly, some men wanting estrogen will simply take birth-control pills. Testosterone is harder to improvise, but even the real thing can irreparably damage internal organs when taken improperly. All of this can result in fatalities.

“I have known several people that passed,” Sharmus sighs. She steers clear of silicone and stopped taking unsupervised hormones. A couple of years ago, she started working with an organization called Helping Individual Prostitutes Survive, or HIPS. She conducts outreach for HIPS, offering information on how to protect against HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, and encouraging colleagues to leave the silicone alone.

Omar Reyes, whose drag persona is former Miss Gay America, works for La Clinica del Pueblo, a D.C. clinic serving the city’s ballooning Latino community. Reyes uses his male birth name and male pronouns but considers himself transgender because of his drag work and his discomfort with male gender “norms.” In his monthly transgender support group and in conversations with other drag queens he meets at his weekly show, Reyes harps on the malas noticias about silicone. But he recognizes why it’s attractive: It’s cheap, and it’s fast.

“IThey put silicone in their face and their bodies and, in just a very short period, they can look like a woman,” he says. This is particularly important for drag performers and sex workers, whose income may depend on how exaggeratedly feminine they look. “We have to deal with the fact that they want to look like a woman, and this is the short-term way to do it.”

Reyes and Xavier want to see someone in D.C. start a low-cost clinic devoted to counseling and treatment for people who are transitioning. Gay health centers in Boston, Los Angeles, New York City, San Francisco, and Seattle all have such clinics already and are developing their own sets of protocols for how the process should work. Earlier this year, San Francisco became the first jurisdiction in the United States to include sex reassignment surgery and related treatments in its health plan for civil servants. This is the kind of thing Xavier says we need to see more of.

But even if the services were there, getting people into them would take work. Most transgender people tell horrifying stories of the treatment they have experienced in health care settings. In one of the most high-profile cases nationally, a trans woman named Tyni Hunter died in 1995 when D.C. paramedics refused to treat her wounds from a car accident. After removing her clothes at the scene of the accident and discovering her male genitals, a paramedic allegedly ceased treating Hunter and began shouting insults. She died at the hospital later. Following a lengthy court battle, Hunter’s family won a suit against the city.

There are many less prominent examples. From the hospital nurse who gawks when helping a trans woman into her dressing gown to the
gyneecologist who responds with disbelief when a trans man comes in for a checkup, the small indignities act as perhaps the greatest barriers to health care.

“They feel like when you go for services, people are going to give attitude,” Reyes says. “Therefore, you find that they don’t even think about going for help when they really need it.”

Tanika Walker, who goes by Lucky, is your standard eighteen-year-old hard ass: short-sighted, stubborn-headed, determined to be the toughest guy in the room. Born and raised in rough-and-tumble southeast Washington, D.C., Lucky has a mop of dreadlocks, light mustache, tattoos, and brands—including the name of a deceased sibling spelled out in cigarette burns. These all send one message: I’m the wrong dude to mess with.

Like Angela, Lucky is in the process of transitioning genders to become a young man. It’s an emotional journey she began when she was fourteen years old. Along the way, she’s been yanked out of school and tossed out of her home. She’s also been involved in a lot of disastrous relationships, marred by violence, often her own.

“I know that I’m homosexual, that I’m a lesbian,” Lucky says, groping to explain her feelings. “But at the same time, it’s like, I look so much like a boy. I act so much like a boy. I want to be a boy.”

So far, however, Lucky’s transition is primarily stylistic. She still uses her birth name and answers to female pronouns, but she describes her gender as “not anything.” She uses only the men’s bathroom because she’s had too many fights with women who thought she was a Peeping Tom in the ladies’ room. And she’d much rather her friends call her “dawg” than “girlfriend.”

Among African American lesbians, Lucky fits into a category of women often dubbed “doms,” short for dominant.

“I never had chests,” Lucky brags. “Never. Around the time you’re supposed to start getting chests, I didn’t get any. So I was like, am I made to be like this? I was the little girl all of the other little girls couldn’t play with ‘cause I was too boyish.”

The dyke jokes started early, sometime in middle school. She settled on a violent response to the taunting just as early. Her fighting became routine enough that by her sophomore year the school suggested counseling for her “identity crisis.” She balked and, instead, came out to her mom, who promptly threw her out of the house. “I was like, how am I having an identity crisis? I know what I am,” Lucky remembers. “My mom said I had to go.”

Lucky enrolled herself in the Job Corps and by the time she was seventeen had her GED. She came back to D.C., moved in with her godsisiter, and began dating a thirty-two-year-old woman.

But the relationship quickly turned violent, and the godsisiter put Lucky out as well. She turned to one of her brothers and started dating someone her own age. But it was a stormy relationship, and Lucky battered her partner. After one of their more brutal fights, the young woman called the police and Lucky wound up in jail for a month for aggravated assault. That was this April. In May, she started dating another young woman, and she believes this relationship will work out. She’s also started hanging out at the Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League (SMYAL).

One urgent lesson she’s trying to learn is that violence isn’t her only option when conflict arises. But she dismisses the severity of her problem. “I would be, like, ‘Go away and leave me alone,”’ she says, describing how the fights started. “And she would just keep hitting me in the arm or something. But it didn’t really affect me; it would just be real irritating. She used to do stupid stuff like that to aggravate me. So I just hit her. And when I hit her, I blazed her eye out or something.”

She sums up her life in a gigantic understatement, saying, “It’s just some things I’ve been through that a normal eighteen-year-old female wouldn’t have been through.”

Twenty-year-old Vassar College senior Kiara Moore began transitioning at seventeen. She is articulate and engaging, has never been in trouble, and is studying to become a clinical psychologist. As the only transgender person on her campus, she comes out to the entire first-year class every term during one of the school’s diversity programs. She spent this summer interning at SMYAL, counseling Lucky and fifteen to twenty other mainly black transgender youth. What these young folks need, she says, are more role models.

“I am here at SMYAL working as an intern, but where else can you go around the country and see a trans intern? Where can you see a trans person who’s in college?” Moore asks. “And so you don’t really have anyone to connect to or know about. So if they are at high risk for social problems, that’s why. Because there’s nothing there for them at all.”

Moore has what Xavier calls “passing privilege.” She’s a beautiful and confident black woman most would never assume is transgender. That’s something usually achieved only by those with significant resources.

And once trans people have found they can pass—usually middle class whites living in the suburbs—they don’t want to ruin it by becoming an activist or a role model.

“You lose something if you help, because then you put yourself in the spotlight. And if you are a pretty, passable female, you don’t want to do that,” Moore explains. “We don’t want to be advocates, because then we’re the transsexual instead of Kiara the new neighbor.”

And thus the activists trying to build a transgender community and social movement face much the same battle gay activists confronted for years: those with the resources to help have too much to lose.

But Moore sees promise in the youth she spent the summer with. “Every time I talk to them I always give them a big hug before, during, and after the session, because that’s the only way I can say I’m here and I think you’re stronger than me,” she says. “They deal with their problems, and they come in here, and they smile, every day. And they take care of each other.”
In cases of ambiguity in countries with modern medicine, surgery is usually performed to make the genitalia more clearly male or female. See J. Butler 1990 for an analysis of how doing gender is gender identity. On the "logic of practice," or how the experience of gender is embedded in the norms of everyday interaction and the structure of formal organizations, see Acker 1990; Bourdieu [1980] 1990; Connell 1987; Smith 1987.

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10

MASCULINITY AS HOMOPHOBIA

MICHAEL S. KIMMEL

Even if we do not subscribe to Freudian psychoanalytic ideas, we can still observe how, in less sexualized terms, the father is the first man who evaluates the boy's masculine performance, the first pair of male eyes before whom he tries to prove himself. Those eyes will follow him for the rest of his life. Other men's eyes will join them—the eyes of role models as teachers, coaches, bosses, or media heroes; the eyes of his peers, his friends, his workmates; and the eyes of millions of other men, living and dead, from whose constant scrutiny of his performance he will never be free. "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living," was how Karl Marx put it over a century ago (1848/1964, p. 11). "The birthright of every American male is a chronic sense of personal inadequacy," is how two psychologists describe it today (Woolfolk & Richardson, 1978, p. 57).

That nightmare from which we never seem to awaken is that those other men will see that sense of inadequacy, they will see that in our own eyes we are not who we are pretending to be. What we call masculinity is often a hedge against being revealed as a fraud, an exaggerated set of activities that keep others from seeing through us, and a frenzied effort to keep at bay those fears within ourselves. Our real fear is "not fear of women but of being ashamed or humiliated in front of other men, or being dominated by stronger men" (Leverenz, 1986, p. 451).

This, then, is the great secret of American manhood: We are afraid of other men. Homophobia is a central organizing principle of our cultural definition of manhood. Homophobia is more than the irrational fear of gay men, more than the fact that we might be perceived as gay. "The word 'faggot' has nothing to do with homosexual experience or even with fears of homosexuals," writes David Leverenz (1986). "It comes out of the depths of manhood: a label of ultimate contempt for anyone who seems sissy, untough, uncool.

Michael Kimmel, excerpt from "Masculinity as Homophobia" (1994). Copyright © 1994 by Michael S. Kimmel. All rights reserved.
Homophobia is the fear that other men will unmask us, masculinate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men. We are afraid to let other men see that fear. Fear makes us ashamed, because the recognition of fear in ourselves is proof to ourselves that we are not as manly as we pretend, that we are, like the young man in a poem by Yeats, "one that ruffles in a manly pose for all his timid heart." Our fear is the fear of humiliation. We are ashamed to be afraid.

Shame leads to silence—the silences that keep other people believing that we actually approve of the things that are done to women, to minorities, to gays and lesbians in our culture. The frightened silence as we scurry past a woman being hassled by men on the street. That furtive silence when men make sexist or racist jokes in a bar. That clammy-handed silence when guys in the office make gay-bashing jokes. Our fears are the sources of our silences, and men's silence is what keeps the system running. This might help to explain why women often complain that their male friends or partners are often so understanding when they are alone and yet laugh at sexist jokes or even make those jokes themselves when they are out with a group.

The fear of being seen as a sissy dominates the cultural definitions of manhood. It starts so early. "Boys among boys are ashamed to be unmanly," wrote one educator in 1871 (cited in Rotundo, 1993, p. 264). I have a standing bet with a friend that I can walk onto any playground in America when 6-year-old boys are happily playing and by asking one question, I can provoke a fight. That question is simple: "Who's a sissy around here?" Once posed, the challenge is made. One of two things is likely to happen. One boy will accuse another of being a sissy, to which that boy will respond that he is not a sissy, that the first boy is. They may have to fight it out to see who's lying. Or a whole group of boys will surround one boy and all shout "He is. He is!" That boy will either burst into tears and run home crying, disgraced, or he will have to take on several boys at once, to prove that he's not a sissy. (And what will his father or older brothers tell him if he chooses to run home crying?) It will be some time before he regains any sense of self-respect.

Violence is often the single most evident marker of manhood. Rather it is the willingness to fight, the desire to fight. The origin of our expression that one has a chip on one's shoulder lies in the practice of an adolescent boy in the countryside or small town at the turn of the century, who would literally walk around with a chip of wood balanced on his shoulder—a signal of his readiness to fight with anyone who would take the initiative of knocking the chip off (see Gorer, 1964, p. 38; Mead, 1965).

As adolescents, we learn that our peers are a kind of gender police, constantly threatening to unmask us as feminine, as sissies. One of the favorite tricks when I was an adolescent was to ask a boy to look at his fingernails. If he held his palm toward his face and curled his fingers back to see them, he passed the test. He'd looked at his nails "like a man." But if he held the back of his hand away from his face, and looked at his fingernails with arm outstretched, he was immediately ridiculed as a sissy.

As young men we are constantly riding those gender boundaries, checking the fences we have constructed on the perimeter, making sure that nothing—no remotely feminine might show through. The possibilities of being unmasked are everywhere. Even the most seemingly insignificant thing can pose a threat or activate that haunting terror. On the day the students in my course "Sociology of Men and Masculinities" were scheduled to discuss homophobia and male-male friendships, one student provided a touching illustration. Noting that it was a beautiful day, the first day of spring after a brutal northeast winter, he decided to wear shorts to class. "I had this really nice pair of new Madras shorts," he commented. "But then I thought to myself, these shorts have lavender and pink in them. Today's class topic is homophobia. Maybe today is not the best day to wear these shorts."

Our efforts to maintain a manly front cover everything we wear. How we talk. How we walk. What we eat. Every mannerism, every movement contains a coded gender language. Think, for example, of how you would answer the question: How do you know if a man is homosexual? When I ask this question in classes or workshops, respondents invariably provide a pretty standard list of stereotypically effeminate behaviors. He walks a certain way, talks a certain way, acts a certain way. He's very emotional; he shows his feelings. One woman commented that she "knows" a man is gay if he really cares about her; another said she knows he's gay if he shows no interest in her, if he leaves her alone.

Now alter the question and imagine what heterosexual men do to make sure no one could possibly get the "wrong idea" about them. Responses typically refer to the original stereotypes, this time as a set of negative rules about behavior. Never dress that way. Never talk or walk that way. Never show your feelings or get emotional. Always be prepared to demonstrate sexual interest in women that you meet, so it is impossible for any woman to get the wrong idea about you. In this sense, homophobia, the fear of being perceived as gay, as not a real man, keeps men exaggerating all the traditional rules of masculinity, including sexual predation with women. Homophobia and sexism go hand in hand.

The stakes of perceived sissydome are enormous—sometimes matters of life and death. We take enormous risks to prove our manhood, exposing ourselves disproportionately to health risks, workplace hazards, and stress-related illnesses. Men commit suicide three times as often as women. Psychiatrist Willard Gaylin (1992) explains that it is "invariably because of perceived social humiliation," most often tied to failure in business:

Men become depressed because of loss of status and power in the world of men. It is not the loss of money, or the material advantages that money could buy, which produces the despair that leads to self-destruction. It is the "shame," the "humiliation," the sense of personal "failure." ... A man despairs when he has ceased being a man among men. (p. 32)
In one survey, women and men were asked what they were most afraid of. Women responded that they were most afraid of being raped and murdered. Men responded that they were most afraid of being laughed at (Noble, 1992, pp. 105-106).

**Power and Powerlessness in the Lives of Men**

I have argued that homophobia, men’s fear of other men, is the animating condition of the dominant definition of masculinity in America, that the reigning definition of masculinity is a defensive effort to prevent being emasculated. In our efforts to suppress or overcome these fears, the dominant culture exacts a tremendous price from those deemed less than fully manly: women, gay men, non-native-born men, men of color. This perspective may help clarify a paradox in men’s lives, a paradox in which men have virtually all the power and yet do not feel powerful (see Kaufman, 1993).

Manhood is equated with power—over women, over other men. Everywhere we look, we see the institutional expression of that power—in state and national legislatures, on the boards of directors of every major U.S. corporation or law firm, and in every school and hospital administration. Women have long understood this, and feminist women have spent the past three decades challenging both the public and the private expressions of men’s power and acknowledging their fear of men. Feminism as a set of theories both explains women’s fear of men and empowers women to confront it both publicly and privately. Feminist women have theorized that masculinity is about the drive for domination, the drive for power, for conquest.

This feminist definition of masculinity as the drive for power is theorized from women’s point of view. It is how women experience masculinity. But it assumes a symmetry between the public and the private that does not conform to men’s experiences. Feminists observe that women, as a group, do not hold power in our society. They also observe that individually, they, as women, do not feel powerful. They feel afraid, vulnerable. Their observation of the social reality and their individual experiences are therefore symmetrical. Feminism also observes that men, as a group, are in power. Thus, with the same symmetry, feminism has tended to assume that individually men must feel powerful.

This is why the feminist critique of masculinity often falls on deaf ears with men. When confronted with the analysis that men have all the power, many men react incredulously. “What do you mean, men have all the power?” they ask. “What are you talking about? My wife bosses me around. My kids boss me around. My boss bosses me around. I have no power at all!” I’m completely powerless!”

Men’s feelings are not the feelings of the powerful, but of those who see themselves as powerless. These are the feelings that come inevitably from the discontinuity between the social and the psychological. Between the aggregate analysis that reveals how men are in power as a group and the psychological fact that they do not feel powerful as individuals. They are the feelings of men who were raised to believe themselves entitled to feel that power, but do not feel it. No wonder many men are frustrated and angry.

This may explain the recent popularity of those workshops and retreats designed to help men to claim their “inner” power, their “deep manhood,” or their “warrior within.” Authors such as Bly (1990), Moore and Gillette (1991, 1992, 1993a, 1993b), Farrell (1986, 1993), and Keen (1991) honor and respect men’s feelings of powerlessness and acknowledge those feelings to be both true and real. “They gave white men the semblance of power,” notes John Lee, one of the leaders of these retreats (quoted in Ferguson, 1992, p. 28). “We’ll let you run the country, but in the meantime, stop feeling, stop talking, and continue swallowing your pain and your hurt.” (We are not told who “they” are.)

Often the purveyors of the mythopoetic men’s movement, that broad umbrella that encompasses all the groups helping men to retrieve this mythic deep manhood, use the image of the chauffeur to describe modern man’s position. The chauffeur appears to have the power—he’s wearing the uniform, he’s in the driver’s seat, and he knows where he’s going. So, to the observer, the chauffeur looks as though he is in command. But to the chauffeur himself, they note, he is merely taking orders. He is not at all in charge.1

Despite the reality that everyone knows chauffeurs do not have the power, this image remains appealing to the men who hear it at these weekend workshops. But there is a missing piece to the image, a piece concealed by the framing of the image in terms of the individual man’s experience. That missing piece is that the person who is giving the orders is also a man. Now we have a relationship between men—men giving orders and other men taking those orders. The man who identifies with the chauffeur is entitled to be the man giving the orders, but he is not. (“They,” it turns out, are other men.)

The dimension of power is now reinserted into men’s experience not only as the product of individual experience but also as the product of relations with other men. In this sense, men’s experience of powerlessness is real—the man actually feels it and certainly acts on it—but it is not true, that is, it does not accurately describe their condition. In contrast to women’s lives, men’s lives are structured around relationships of power and men’s differential access to power, as well as the differential access to that power of men as a group. Our imperfect analysis of our own situation leads us to believe that we men need more power, rather than leading us to support feminists’ efforts to rearrange power relationships along more equitable lines.

Philosopher Hannah Arendt (1970) fully understood this contradictory experience of social and individual power:

> Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to
a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together. When we say of somebody that he is “in power” we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name. The moment the group, from which the power originated to begin with . . . disappears, his “power” also vanishes. (p. 44)

Why, then, do American men feel so powerless? Part of the answer is because we’ve constructed the rules of manhood so that only the tiniest fraction of men can come to believe that they are the biggest of wheels, the stoutest of oaks, the most virulent repudiators of femininity, the most daring and aggressive. We’ve managed to disempower the overwhelming majority of American men by other means—such as discriminating on the basis of race, class, ethnicity, age, or sexual preference.

Masculinist retreats to retrieve deep, wounded masculinity are but one of the ways in which American men currently struggle with their fears and their shame. Unfortunately, at the very moment that they work to break down the isolation that governs men’s lives, as they enable men to express those fears and that shame, they ignore the social power that men continue to exert over women and the privileges from which they (as the middle-aged, middle-class white men who largely make up these retreats) continue to benefit—regardless of their experiences as wounded victims of oppressive male socialization.

Others still rehearse the politics of exclusion, as if by clearing away the playing field of secure gender identity of any that we deem less than manly—women, gay men, nontrans-men, men of color—middle-class, straight, white men can reground their sense of themselves without those haunting fears and that deep shame that they are unmanly and will be exposed by other men. This is the manhood of racism, of sexism, of homophobia. It is the manhood that is so chronically insecure that it trembles at the idea of lifting the ban on gays in the military, that is so threatened by women in the workplace that women become the targets of sexual harassment, that is so deeply frightened of equality that it must ensure that the playing field of male competition remains stacked against all newcomers to the game.

Exclusion and escape have been the dominant methods American men have used to keep their fears of humiliation at bay. The fear of emasculation by other men, of being humiliated, of being seen as a sissy, is the leitmotif in my reading of the history of American manhood. Masculinity has become a relentless test by which we prove to other men, to women, and ultimately to ourselves, that we have successfully mastered the part. The restlessness that men feel today is nothing new in American history; we have been anxious and restless for almost two centuries. Neither exclusion nor escape has ever brought us the relief we’ve sought, and there is no reason to think that either will solve our problems now. Peace of mind, relief from gender struggle, will come only from a politics of inclusion, not exclusion, from standing up for equality and justice, and not by running away.

NOTE
1. The image is from Warren Farrell, who spoke at a workshop I attended at the First International Men’s Conference, Austin, Texas, October 1991.

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JUST WALK ON BY
A Black Man Ponders His Power to Alter Public Space

BRENT STAPLES

My first victim was a woman—white, well dressed, probably in her early twenties. I came upon her late one evening on a deserted street in Hyde Park, a relatively affluent neighborhood in an otherwise mean, impoverished section of Chicago. As I swung onto the avenue behind her, there seemed to be a discreet, unobtrusive distance between us. Not so. She cast back a worried glance. To her, the youngish black man—a broad six feet two inches with a beard and billowing hair, both hands shoved into the pockets of a bulky military jacket—seemed menacingly close. After a few more quick glimpses, she picked up her pace and was soon running in earnest. Within seconds she disappeared into a cross street.

That was more than a decade ago. I was 22 years old, a graduate student newly arrived at the University of Chicago. It was in the echo of that terrified woman's footsteps that I first began to know the unwieldy inheritance I'd come into—the ability to alter public space in ugly ways. It was clear that she thought herself the quarry of a mugger, a rapist, or worse. Suffering a bout of insomnia, however, I was stalking sleep, not defenseless wayfarers. As a softy who is scarcely able to take a knife to a raw chicken—let alone hold it to a person's throat—I was surprised, embarrassed, and dismayed all at once. Her flight made me feel like an accomplice in tyranny. It also made it clear that I was indistinguishable from the muggers who occasionally seeped into the area from the surrounding ghetto. That first encounter, and those that followed, signified that a vast, unnerving gulf lay between nighttime pedestrians—particularly women—and me. And I soon gathered that being perceived as dangerous is a hazard in itself. I only needed to turn a corner into a dicey situation, or crowd some frightened, armed person in a corner, or make that errant move after being pulled over by a policeman. Where fear and weapons meet—and they often do in urban America—there is always the possibility of death.

In that first year, my first away from my hometown, I was to become thoroughly familiar with the language of fear. At dark, shadowy intersections in Chicago, I could cross in front of a car stopped at a traffic light and elicit
of themselves as tough guys. When a mark cowered and surrendered his money without resistance, myth and reality merged—and paid off. It is, after all, only manly to embrace the power to frighten and intimidate. We, as men, are not supposed to give an inch of our lane on the highway; we are to size the fighter’s edge in work and in play and even in love; we are to be blatant in the face of hostile forces.

I moved to New York nearly two years ago and have remained an avowed night walker. In central Manhattan, the near-constant crowd cover minimizes tense one-on-one street encounters. Elsewhere—visiting friends in SoHo, where sidewalks are narrow and tightly spaced buildings shut out the sky—things can get very taut indeed.

Black men have a firm place in New York mugging literature. Norman Podhoretz in his famed (or infamous) 1963 essay, “My Negro Problem—And Ours,” recalls growing up in terror of black males; they “were tougher than we were, more ruthless,” he writes—and as an adult on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, he continues, he cannot constrain his nervousness when he meets black men on certain streets. Similarly, a decade later, the essayist and novelist Edward Hoagland extols a New York where once “Negro bitterness bore down mainly on other Negroes.” Where some see mere panhandlers, Hoagland sees “a mugger who is clearly screwing up his nerve to do more than just ask for money.” But Hoagland has the New Yorker’s quick-hand posture for broken-field maneuvering, and the bad guy swerves away.

I often witness that “hunch posture,” from women after dark on the waterlike streets of Brooklyn where I live. They seem to set their faces on neutral and, with their purse straps swung across their chests bandolier style, they forge ahead as though bracing themselves against being tackled. I understand, of course, that the danger they perceive is not a hallucination. Women are particularly vulnerable to street violence, and young black males are drastically overrepresented among the perpetrators of that violence. Yet these truths are no solace against the kind of alienation that comes of being ever the suspect, against being set apart, a fearsome entity with whom pedestrians avoid making eye contact.

It is not altogether clear to me how I reached the ripe old age of 22 without being conscious of the lethality nighttime pedestrians attributed to me. Perhaps it was because in Chester, Pennsylvania, the small, angry industrial town where I came of age in the 1960s, I was scarcely noticeable against a backdrop of gang warfare, street knifings, and murders. I grew up one of the good boys, had perhaps a half-dozen fist fights. In retrospect, my shyness and combat has clear sources.

Many things go into the making of a young thug. One of those things is the consummation of the male romance with the power to intimidate. An infant discovers that random flailings send the baby bottle flying out of the crib and crashing to the floor. Delighted, the joyful babe repeats those motions again and again, seeking to duplicate the feat. Just so, I recall the point at which some of my boyhood friends were finally seduced by the perception.
I have been calm and extremely congenial on those rare occasions when I’ve been pulled over by the police.

And on late-evening constitutionals along streets less traveled by, I employ what has proved to be an excellent tension-reducing measure: I whistle melodies from Beethoven and Vivaldi and the more popular classical composers. Even steely New Yorkers hunching toward nighttime destinations seem to relax, and occasionally they even join in the tune. Virtually everybody seems to sense that a mugger wouldn’t be warbling bright, sunny selections from Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons*. It is my equivalent of the cowbell that hikers wear when they know they are in bear country.

\[ \text{21} \]
\[ \text{TAking IT} \]
\[ \text{LEONARD KRIEGEL} \]

In 1944, at the age of eleven, I had polio. I spent the next two years of my life in an orthopedic hospital, appropriately called a reconstruction home. By 1946, when I returned to my native Bronx, polio had reconstructed me to the point that I walked very haltingly on steel braces and crutches.

But polio also taught me that, if I were to survive, I would have to become a man—and become a man quickly. “Be a man!” my immigrant father urged, by which he meant “become an American.” For, in 1946, this country had very specific expectations about how a man faced adversity. Endurance, courage, determination, stoicism—these might right the balance with fate.

“I couldn’t take it, and I took it,” says the wheelchair—doomed poolroom entrepreneur William Eihorn in Saul Bellow’s *The Adventures of Augie March*. “And I can’t take it, yet I do take it.” In 1953, when I first read these words, I knew that Eihorn spoke for me—as he spoke for scores of other men who had confronted the legacy of a maiming disease by risking whatever they possessed of substance in a country that believed that such risks were a man’s wagers against his fate.

How one faced adversity was, like most of American life, in part a question of gender. Simply put, a woman endured, but a man fought back. You were better off struggling against the effects of polio as a man than as a woman, for polio was a disease that one confronted by being tough, sive, decisive, by assuming that all limitations could be overcome, conquered. In short, by being “a man.” Even the vocabulary of rehab was masculine. One “beat” polio by outmuscling the disease. At the eighteen, I felt that I was “a better man” than my friends because “克服” overcome a handicap.” And I had, in the process, showed that I could, in the world of American men, to take it was a sign that you were the elect—an assumption my “normal” friends shared. “You’re luck closest friend said to me during an intensely painful crisis in his or “You had polio.” He meant it. We both believed it.

Obviously, I wasn’t lucky. By nineteen, I was already beginning the hard—slowly, painfully, but inexorably—that disease is never quenched” or “overcome.” Still, I looked up on polio as the of my manhood. As an American, I was self-reliant. I could create possibilities from life. And so I walked mile after mile on brac crutches. I did hundreds of push-ups every day to build my arms, shoulders. I lifted weights to the point that I would collapse, exhaust strengthened, on the floor. And through it all, my desire to create a “n life for myself was transformed into a desire to become the man my dad decreed I should be.

I took my heroes where I found them—a strange, disparate comp men: Hemingway, whom I would write of years later as “my nurse” Reiser, whom I dreamed of replacing in Ebbets Field’s pastures and penchant for crashing into outfield walls fused in my mind with war against the virus; Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who had scornfull polio with aristocratic disdain and patrician distance (a historian a tance recently disabused me of that myth, a myth perpetrated, let by almost all of Roosevelt’s biographers); Henry Fonda and Gary Co whose resolute Anglo-Saxon faces Hollywood blended the sin strength and courage a man needed if he was going to survive as a m number of boxers in whom heart, discipline and training combined off defeats the boy’s limitations made inevitable. These were the “images I conjured up as I walked those miles of Bronx streets, as I did relentless push-ups, as I moved up and down one subway staircase a other by turning each concrete step into a personal insult. And they w the images when, fifteen years later, married, the father of two sons own, a Fulbright professor in the Netherlands, I would grab hold of poles in a train in The Hague and swing my brace-bound body ac dead space between platform and carriage, filled with self-congrat vanity as amazement spread over the features of the Dutch conduct.

It is easy to dismiss such images as adolescent. Undoubtedly the But they helped remind me, time and time again, of how men handle diseases and their pain. Of course, I realized even then that it was not of manhood alone that had helped me fashion a life out of polio. I mig of Hemingway as “my nurse,” but it was an immigrant Jewish m