



Self-Made Men: Identity and Embodiment among Transsexual Men

By Henry Rubin

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In *Self-Made Men*, Henry Rubin explores the production of male identities in the lives of twenty-two FTM transsexuals--people who have changed their sex from female to male. The author relates the compelling personal narratives of his subjects to the historical emergence of FTM as an identity category.

In the interviews that form the heart of the book, the FTMs speak about their struggles to define themselves and their diverse experiences, from the pressures of gender conformity in adolescence to being mistaken for "butch lesbians," from hormone treatments and surgeries to relationships with families, partners, and acquaintances. Their stories of feeling betrayed by their bodies and of undergoing a "second puberty" are vivid and thought-provoking. Throughout the interviews, the subjects' claims to having "core male identities" are remarkably consistent and thus challenge anti-essentialist assumptions in current theories of gender, embodiment, and identity.

Rubin uses two key methods to analyze and interpret his findings. Adapting Foucault's notions of genealogy, he highlights the social construction of gender categories and identities. His account of the history of endocrinology and medical technologies for transforming bodies demonstrates that the "family resemblance" between transsexuals and intersexuals was a necessary postulate for medical intervention into the lives of the emerging FTMs. The book also explores the historical emergence of the category of FTM transsexual as distinguished from the category of lesbian woman and the resultant "border disputes" over identity between the two groups. Rubin complements this approach with phenomenological concepts that stress the importance of lived experience and the individual's capacity for knowledge and action.

An important contribution to several fields, including sociology of the body, gender and masculinity, human development, and the history of science, *Self-Made Me* will be of interest to anyone who has seriously pondered what it means to be a man and how men become men.

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Editorial Review

Review

. . . readers of *Self-Made Men* will gain a thorough understanding of many of the theoretical challenges surrounding transsexual identity, embodiment, and politics.

--*Feminist Collections*

Henry Rubin has written a fascinating, vivid, and intellectually important book. This is the best contribution in years to the understanding of 'transsexuals' and gender transitions. Rubin combines contemporary life-history interviews, historical documents, and several schools of theory to create a strikingly original interpretation of the nature and history of transgender identities. Written with clarity and passion, this is a book that should be read (and will be enjoyed) by everyone who wants to understand contemporary gender issues.

--R. W. Connell

About the Author

Henry Rubin is a visiting assistant professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Tufts University.

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