

Debunking Phallacies

by

Michael B. Gaines

May, 2024

Director of Thesis: Angela Wells
Major Department: School of Art and Design

This document provides written support for the thesis exhibition, *Debunking Phallacies*. The body of work uses photography to explore my personal myth that to be seen as legitimate and successful I need to adhere to socially determined, heteronormative concepts of masculinity and gender binaries. As members of the LGBTQ community continue to discover and redefine our personal identities, declarations of these strict gender binaries and specifically gendered clothing, combined with open discrimination disguised as freedom of speech, violence committed under the auspices of religious freedom, and dubious claims of persecution pervade the rhetoric of the opposition and help to perpetuate this myth. These attacks are a means of intimidation and forcing members of the queer community, myself included, back into the closet and eradicating both our imprint on and presence in society. After years of being told we are less than and don't belong, we instinctively suppress our true identities and deploy increased levels of masking and code-switching – alternating or adjusting our language, grammatical structure, behavior, and appearance to fit into the dominant culture – as a means of self-preservation, and self-sabotage. In researching the work of contemporary and historical photographers who work with identity and LGBTQ-related topics, this series examines these concepts through the lens of photography.

Debunking Phallacies

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the School of Art and Design

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

by

Michael B. Gaines

May, 2024

Director of Dissertation: Angela Wells, MFA

Thesis Committee Members:

Daniel Kariko, MFA

Lisa Beth Robinson, MFA

© Michael B. Gaines, 2024

DEDICATION

To Grammie & Papa.

*I wish you both could be here to see this exhibition
and how far I have come as a photographer.*

I hope that I have made you both proud.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my family and friends for all their unwavering support ever since I decided to go back to school. Knowing you have been there has given me strength when I have needed it the most, more than I can possibly put into words. I would also like to acknowledge the incredible group of mentors in the School of Art & Design who have been by my side these past three years. Though I could not put all of them on my thesis committee, each one has provided immeasurable guidance, assistance, and nudging when I needed it, whether I realized it or not. To my thesis committee, this work never would have been possible without you. You have been by my side since Day One at ECU, believed in me when I did not believe in myself, and never let up. To Angela Wells, you gave me a “coming to Jesus” moment when I needed it the most, changing everything and made me more committed to my work than ever before. To Daniel Kariko, for playing the “straight man” to my work and giving me insight and perspective from a way that I could not see. To Lisa Beth Robinson, for asking tough questions to make me think and consider my work in new ways, and the many conversations over cups of coffee when I needed a mental break (plus all the book stuff). Lastly, to Kate Bukoski, Seo Eo, Dan Elliott, Jeb Hedgecock, Gerald Weckesser, and Larry Houston, for all the impromptu conversations and generous offering of your advice, observations, guidance, and overall assistance with my work. Each one of you have left an imprint on me and my work that I am eternally grateful for.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures	vi
List of Plates	vii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: The Personal Myth	2
Chapter 2: My Relationship with Masculinity.....	6
Chapter 3: Identity & Finding Place	18
Chapter 4: Code Switching & Masking.....	34
Conclusion	41
References.....	42
Appendix 1: Photographs Used in Thesis Exhibition.....	45
Appendix 2: Documentation of Thesis Exhibition	48

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Holly Woodlawn, c. 1970.....	10
Figure 2: Still from Dire Straits’ “Money for Nothing” music video.....	11
Figure 3: Image from “Beautiful Boy” (Lissa Rivera)	25
Figure 4: Image from “Beautiful Boy” (Lissa Rivera)	25
Figure 5: King Henry VIII, c. 1540	26
Figure 6: George Villiers, c. 1626	26
Figure 7: Sir Yadavindra Singh, Maharaja of Patiala, 1928	26
Figure 8: Image from “Cowboy Juice” (Evan Benally Atwood).....	29
Figure 9: Image from “Cowboy Juice” (Evan Benally Atwood).....	29
Figure 10: Self-portrait (blue room), 2021 (Jess T. Dugan)	31
Figure 11: JD and Steve, 2020 (Jess T. Dugan).....	31
Figure 12: 1879 ad in Harper’s Bazaar for women and children’s union suits	40
Figure 13: 1911 ad for S. T. Coopers and Sons’ Kenosha Klosed Krotch union suit	40

LIST OF PLATES

Plate 1: Disquietude	4
Plate 2: Boys Don't Belong in Grandma's Kitchen.....	8
Plate 3: An Abundance of Caution, Emerging from Layers of Oppression	14
Plate 4: Turning Away from the Sound of My Own Voice.....	15
Plate 5: Hiding From a Fear of the Expected.....	17
Plate 6: Masc Drag.....	19
Plate 7: To Luxuriate (Hidden Among Layers)	20
Plate 8: To Luxuriate (Behind Closed Doors)	21
Plate 9: Transmogrification.....	24
Plate 10: I Am She Who Adorn'd Herself.....	28
Plate 11: Subtle Embellishments Make Me Feel Pretty.....	30
Plate 12: Debunking Phallacies	33
Plate 13: Subtle Shifts Are Not as Subtle as We Think They Are.....	37
Plate 14: Binaries	39
Plate 15: Among Other Uniques, I Still Feel Alone	45
Plate 16: False Simplicity of Expectation.....	45
Plate 17: Pay No Attention to the Man Behind the Curtain.....	46
Plate 18: Twinkle Toes	46
Plate 19: Veneers	47
Plate 20: Your Son, the Seamstress	47
Plate 21: Beginning of Thesis Exhibition in Wellington B. Gray Gallery	48
Plate 22: North View of Thesis Exhibition in Wellington B. Gray Gallery.....	48

Plate 23: South View of Thesis Exhibition in Wellington B. Gray Gallery	49
Plate 24: Group of Selected Images from Exhibition in Wellington B. Gray Gallery	49
Plate 25: Pair of Selected Images from Exhibition in Wellington B. Gray Gallery	50
Plate 26: Pair of Selected Images from Exhibition in Wellington B. Gray Gallery	50

INTRODUCTION

As we navigate everyday life, we are confronted by standards and metrics that society has determined how we should live, act, and present ourselves. These are rooted in a long history that has placed straight, white men as the arbiters of all things, subjugating women and minorities to whatever whim and place within society that they deemed fit. This left little room for anyone to question, much less confront, their station and role in life. As the twenty-first century dawned, however, the LGBTQ community began to take back some of that pre-determination and forge a new path forward where members can openly define who they are and how they choose to present themselves. *Debunking Phallacies* is a visual journey through photographic images where I begin to confront these tenets by which society has determined I must live, and explore who I am as a person, finding the courage to finally accept myself for who I am and to live my life without fear and with the courage to be me.

CHAPTER 1: THE PERSONAL MYTH

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a myth is defined as “a popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something or someone especially: one embodying the ideals and institutions of a society or segment of society,” “an unfounded or false notion,” and “a person or thing having only an imaginary or unverifiable existence” (Myth). All of these are applicable definitions when we consider the idea of the personal myth, something that is rooted in real world, typically formed from experiences we have had in the past – usually in childhood – which we center this belief system around. While it is something that we hold true to ourselves, in the end it is ultimately false and creates a dissonance between how we present externally and how we feel internally.

The idea of the personal myth was first introduced to me by photographer Suzanne Heintz, who explores this concept in her own work about the societal expectations of womanhood, family, and marriage. After hearing her talk about it, I began to realize how much this concept applied to my own work. Ernst Kris first introduced the concept of the personal myth in his 1956 article “The Personal Myth: A Problem in Psychoanalytic Technique” where he of one’s personal history “[it] is not only as one might expect, an essential part of their self-representation, but has become a treasured possession to which the patient is attached with a particular devotion. This attachment reflects the fact that the autobiographical self-image has become heir to important early fantasies, which it preserves. [...] Some aspects of the patients’ conduct of life could best be viewed as a re-enactment of part of the repressed fantasies, which had found their abode in their autobiographical constructions” (653-4).

Gabor Maté, a Canadian physician and author, has written several books and given several lectures where he expands on this concept, addressing the disconnect between the internal and external selves. In a presentation to photography students at East Carolina University in January 2024, Ms. Heintz read a passage from one of Maté's lectures where he said, "This is a society that fundamentally demands of people that they be other than who they are. Because the demand, the expectation is that we fit in...into structures and workplaces and educational institutions, families, and social settings, where if we are ourselves, we risk being rejected. The way our society works is that it rewards us for our self-betrayal. That reward becomes addictive. Our Value is based on Praise. Our culture rewards it, meanwhile, the soul is being ground to dust inside" (Heintz).

The ideas of an expectation of fitting in and the risk of being rejected resonated with me and helped me realize what my own personal myth is: that to be accepted, taken seriously, and seen as legitimate I must adopt societally determined, heteronormative concepts of masculinity and gender binaries. This myth feeds off my own fears of rejection and ridicule and fuels my need to deploy code-switching and masking as acts of self-preservation. I have never felt truly comfortable in strictly "masculine" spaces, places like a barbershop, garage, woodshop, or even a gym, where there is an unwritten understanding that men inherently know their way around, know what everything is, and can fully function within that space. These are spaces that, though occasionally occupied by women, are "predominantly male [oriented] with rules and a culture that favor male sensibilities" (Brett). This discomfort was the idea behind *Disquietude*.



Plate 1. Disquietude

Taken in my father's garage, I photographed myself staring directly into the camera to create a tension and unease with the viewer, which conveys my own tension and unease within the space itself. The chaos within the garage – objects stacked precariously, on the verge of falling off the bench – also adds to these feelings, which are rooted in the idea of being somewhere I was not supposed to be, and a fear that something falling would give away my presence.

Searching for the root of my personal myth grew out of a frustration of not feeling authentic with myself. For as long as I can remember, I have floated through various social groups, adjusting my behavior to conform to and fit in with whatever group I was with at any given time. I never really knew who I was as an individual while always feeling out of place and I was inherently different. I was loathe to use the word 'queer' because of its negative connotations for men seen as effeminate, as well as for anyone who dared question or challenge traditional gender roles or appearances (Worsham). In the end I find it to be a very fitting word for understanding myself and these feelings I have had.

Author bell hooks summed this up succinctly when discussing her own identity as a queer person by saying that queer is “not who you're having sex with, but about being at odds with

everything around it. As the essence of queer, I think of [British academic and queer theorist] Tim Dean's work on being queer and queer not as being about who you're having sex with—that can be a dimension of it—but queer as being about the self that is at odds with everything around it and it has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live" (qtd. in Peake).

To understand why I was doing this, I had to discover what was holding me back and preventing me from living my authentic self. The more I thought about it, the more I kept asking myself 'why,' and as I would come to one conclusion, I then had to find the root of that. This led me down a long-suppressed rabbit hole of questions surrounding my identity, ultimately landing in my childhood.

CHAPTER 2: MY RELATIONSHIP WITH MASCULINITY

By any standard metric I had a normal upbringing. I was born in the suburbs of Washington, D. C., and raised in an upper middle-class home to two loving parents who are still married to this day. I had the misfortune, though, of being given the name Michael Benjamin Gay. My peers latched onto this and were relentless in their teasing of “Michael B. Gay” and “Michael Ben Gay.” My peers and I were too young to know what being gay was but growing up in the 1980s during the AIDS crisis and hearing the way adults talked about it, we knew it was not a good thing. Gay and queer were synonymous and, on more than one occasion, I heard “Smear the Queer” being played on the playground or in gym class, a violent combination of reverse-tag and football where a group tries to tackle the queer – the person holding the ball – in a not-so-subtle metaphor for gay bashing. This is where the seeds of ‘not belonging’ were first planted.

The city that I grew up in was small and still quite rural. We went to the county fair every summer to watch demolition derbies, see the livestock shows and rodeos, and ride all the rides. Guys drove pick-up trucks and dipped, and country music was often the preferred choice of radio stations. All of this left an indelible impression on me, that men – real men, macho men, manly men – were rough and tough, drove trucks, went hunting with their fathers, and wore camo, boots, and ball caps. They were the prototypical, hyper-masculine type that girls loved and were popular in school. Conversely, I was soft spoken, liked to be creative, spend time with my grandmother, play Nintendo, and go exploring the creek in the woods. Even when I played with my G. I. Joe’s, you would rarely hear a sound because all the action took place in my head, involving more dialogue and strategy than gratuitous violence and action.

By the 6th grade I had already begun to have feelings of social anxiety; I had some friends, but never felt like I fit in with any specific social group. When I later started to acknowledge my sexuality, I also began to recognize a brewing triumvirate of conflict. I could not help wondering whether the teasing I had received growing up had subconsciously influenced my not being straight. At the same time, I recognized that my internalized feelings of the self and my sexuality were in direct conflict with societal expectations of masculinity, the same expectations that prompted the teasing in the first place. I had no idea that these conflicts would last for as long as they would. Elisabetta Crocetti, in her paper “Identity Formation in Adolescence,” notes that “the extent to which adolescents find a stable identity is intertwined strongly with their psychosocial functioning and well-being” (145). It is this psychosocial functioning and well-being that ultimately created this social anxiety and ultimately a lack of identity within me.

Playing off the idea and space in *Disquietude*, combined with feelings of otherness, not belonging where the other boys were, and wanting to be where boys were not supposed to be, led to the creation of *Boys Don't Belong in Grandma's Kitchen*. I centered the image around an old spice rack, the same kind both my mother and grandmother had in their kitchens when I was growing up. Taking the photograph later in the day, I used the angle of the setting sun to cast my own shadow across the surface of the spice rack. The silhouette is hovering around the periphery, looming with a hesitation to enter the space.



Plate 2: Boys Don't Belong in Grandma's Kitchen

A Dendrochronology of Masculinity

To fully understand my personal myth first requires an acknowledgement of its existence. I began by looking into my relationship with masculinity and how it conflicts with my internal identity. The tenets of patriarchal masculinity that have been passed from father to son for generations are “an especially potent and toxic system of power and control that has subjugated women and minorities for generations via methodical and organized actions powered by misogyny and racism, a unique brand of maleness that held sway over the United States of America since before its founding” (Sexton 10). Today we recognize this as toxic masculinity, a term that was invented in the 1980s but did not enter the mainstream lexicon until the early 2000s. To acknowledge toxic masculinity implies that there is a gentle (non-toxic) masculinity. This version allows men to express themselves, be caring and show emotion, and be friends with females (think Mr. Rogers or the man who portrayed him in *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*, Tom Hanks) all traits that are unfairly seen as emasculating by large segments of society.

Carol Harrington, senior lecturer in the School of Social and Cultural Studies, University of Wellington, New Zealand, discusses the origins and definitions of toxic masculinity in her paper

“What is ‘Toxic Masculinity’ and Why Does it Matter?” She notes that Shepherd Bliss coined the term to describe his father’s authoritarian style of masculinity while also referring to the work of Frank Pittman who, in 1993, wrote a book on the relationship between fathers, sons, and masculinities. Pittman argued that “men who lack adequate fathering pursue unrealistic cultural images of masculinity and feel a constant need to prove their manhood” (Harrington 347). This resonated with me as it describes my relationship with my father, and the relationship he had with his own father.

I paid attention to the things that my father said as I grew up, and I initially chalked some of them up to his having been in the military, but later came to the realization that they stemmed from the lack of a relationship with his own father. After my grandparents divorced in 1955, my father would spend the summers visiting his father in Oklahoma. His main form of entertainment was watching shows like *Gunsmoke*, *Bonanza*, and *The Rifleman* where the main characters served as surrogate fathers for his own absentee father who was prone to drinking heavily rather than engaging with his own son. I have never pressed my father for too many details about the time he spent with his father growing up, but it is not hard to imagine the burden he felt upon becoming a father himself. Without a positive, real life role model to base fatherhood off, my father had to raise me from scratch while trying to live up to societal expectations of fatherhood.

One morning in high school, my father and I were listening to Lou Reed’s “Walk on the Wild Side” on the car radio. The song opens with the lyrics “Holly came from Miami, F.L.A. / Hitch-hiked her way across the U.S.A. / Plucked her eyebrows on the way / Shaved her legs and then he was a she,” referencing Holly Woodlawn, a transgender actress known for being one of Andy Warhol’s superstars. I don’t remember specifically what he said that morning, but I

remember it being something negative and the feelings those comments elicited in me continued to stay with me.



Figure 1: Holly Woodlawn, c. 1970

Another song that has lived uneasily in my head is “Money for Nothing” by Dire Straits. The song had catchy beats and its music video was a sight to behold, a fun and captivating blend of bright neon colors, live action, animation, and computer-generated figures. But then there were the lyrics. In the third verse, lead singer Mark Knopfler sang: “See the little faggot with the earring and the make up / Yeah, buddy, that’s his own hair / That little faggot got his own jet airplane / That little faggot, he’s a millionaire.” I was too young to understand what a faggot was but, like being taunted for “Michael B. Gay” or called a queer, I knew it was not a good thing. Though the use of the word ‘faggot’ was problematic; what I did not know was that the song was intended to be a form of social commentary. Lead singer Mark Knopfler was not singing the words from his own point of view, but rather as a character – a homophobic, blue-collar, everyday man who was jealous of someone like Knopfler who he’d see on MTV.



Figure 2: Still from Dire Straits' "Money for Nothing" music video

In his book *Written in My Soul: Conversations with Rock's Great Songwriters*, music critic Bill Flanagan recounts an interview with Knopfler about the lyrics shortly after the song's release, where Knopfler said:

The lead character in "Money for Nothing" is a guy who works in the hardware department in a television/custom kitchen/refrigerator/microwave appliance store. He's singing the song. I wrote the song when I was actually in the store. I borrowed a bit of paper and started to write the song down in the store. I wanted to use a lot of the language that the real guy actually used when I heard him, because it was more real. It just went better with the song, it was more muscular. I actually used "little faggot," but there are a couple of good "motherfuckers" in there. [...] I mean that is the way people speak. I think people still get the general idea. You can use other words that will suggest the general feel. It also has to do with the context in which a song's received. If we walk into a hardware store and hear someone say, 'Look at that motherfucker' it means nothing to us, but if you hear it in a pop song.

(399)

From the moment the song was released it attracted criticism and controversy, as well as misinterpretation from people who reacted to the offensive word without considering what the lyrics in their totality were saying. Admittedly, I fell into this camp and remained offended by the song until I began conducting research for this body of work. While the use of the word ‘faggot’ still makes me ill at ease, knowing that the band never meant to glorify this person’s point of view takes some of the sting out of it. The band eventually recognized the problem with using the word and began to remove it from live performances and even from their “best of” compilation album.

As the 1980s gave way to the 1990s, homophobia in mainstream culture continued its march forward reinforcing harmful stereotypes and pigeonholing the community into more distinct genres through movies and television. They included: “the queer serial killer (*Silence of the Lambs*, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*), the sexless gay best friend (*Clueless*, *My Best Friend’s Wedding*), the crazy lesbian (*Butterfly Kiss*, *Single White Female*, *Basic Instinct*), the deceitful trans woman (*The Crying Game*, *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*), the flaming homosexual (*The Birdcage*, *The South Park Movie*), or the tragic gay (*Philadelphia*, *Summer of Sam*, *Happy Together*)” (Armitage). None of these portrayed LGBTQ people in a positive light, which further fueled me leaning into my natural, “straight” appearing tendencies and attributes.

In high school I began to acknowledge that I might not be entirely heterosexual. I could not deny my attraction to other males, but I could not reconcile that against society telling me that I had to get married, have a wife and kids, and a house with the white picket fence. Though this thinking was a relic from the 1950s and the era of *Leave it to Beaver*, in the early to mid-1990’s it was not that far removed and still very much an expectation. This was a time of mental turmoil for me and made my journey that much more confusing. On one hand I was being called a “pussy” by the school’s Athletic Director for being a manager of girls sports instead of playing sports,

deepening my repression, while on the other several legal decisions made me question whether I could ever feasibly acknowledge my attraction to men publicly or not.

In 1993, President Bill Clinton signed the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) bill into law, reshaping the country’s World War II-era ban on gay and lesbians serving in the armed forces. It created a half in/half out of the closet situation for a lot of people and caused more stress and harm than it did good – you could be gay, just not open about it. Three years later Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which defined marriage at the Federal level as between one man and one woman. The law was the result of a fear by conservatives that if gay marriage were to be federally recognized, then all states would have to honor it, regardless of their views on the matter. Instead, DOMA allowed individual states to ignore and discount unions performed in other states, preventing same-sex couples from being federally recognized and denying or limiting their marriage benefits (HUSL). I never had any intention of enlisting, but DADT and DOMA made me question whether my government would ever support my right to exist or get married as a person who was not entirely straight.

By the time that DOMA was passed, I had come out as bisexual and was still reconciling my feelings for men and women. The mental gymnastics I went through were exhausting, trying to figure out how to balance the growing recognition of my attraction to men with my attraction to women, and the societal pressures of having a wife and children. Perhaps it was a combination of societal expectations combined with growing up in such a loving and supportive home, but I have always had a desire to have children. As I became more cognizant of my sexuality, I began to consider what might happen if I had children in the future and my sexuality came to light. Having experienced the cruelty of children first-hand, I decided to become proactive in removing any low-hanging fruit future bullies might grab and decided to change my last name. My uncle had changed

his family's last name to Gaines several years before because of the teasing my cousins got, so I opted to take that last name as my own, something new while keeping it in the family.

These mental gymnastics, the fear of being found out, and being overly cautious were the feelings I drew on when I created *An Abundance of Caution, Emerging from Layers of Oppression*. So much of our queer lives are spent in the closet, hiding from ourselves, our family, and our jobs that sometimes it feels safer to stay hidden. The variety of shirts – polos, button-downs, and flannels – serve as subtle references to the different roles that I navigate through, and how each one has its own level of fear I am hiding from.



Plate 3: An Abundance of Caution, Emerging from Layers of Oppression

I was also struggling with the expectations of “being a man” and how they conflicted with how I felt on the inside. I did not want to be this rough, brusque, emotionless vessel of testosterone – the prototypical Alpha Male – but instead wanted to embrace the softer, delicate side of myself and to be able to freely express my emotions whenever I saw fit. I felt myself buckling under this pressure while a different pressure was building inside of me, but I had to keep the stoic façade because “real men” do not show emotion. It made me wonder if there would be a way that I could have both, but laws like DADT and DOMA made me feel like I could not and that I would

ultimately have to live a closeted life. This pressure became the impetus for *Turning Away from the Sound of My Own Voice*.



Plate 4: Turning Away from the Sound of My Own Voice

Taken during the late afternoon/early evening hours, my shirt and jeans are the most illuminated part of the image, highlighted by the setting sun and bringing your attention to the façade and uniform that I perpetually adorned. The setting sun is also starting to hide my face in some shadow, an allusion to the fact that I felt like I was losing myself to the pressure building inside of me. Directly behind me and intentionally out of my line of sight are light, wispy, feathery shadows being cast upon the wall, a visualization of that softer side of me wanting to be free but that I was deliberately ignoring.

The most impactful thing that happened during this time was not a law, but rather the murder of Matthew Shepard. Over the winter break of 1997-98 I came out to my family as gay, and then proceeded to come out to my fraternity that spring. It was a relief to finally come clean with who I was, and to not be rejected the way that I was afraid I would be. My parents were incredibly supportive, and much to my surprise, so was my fraternity. I began to live more openly as a gay man, but this feeling of freedom would be short lived. On October 6, 1998, Shepard, an

openly gay college student at the University of Wyoming, was beaten by two local men, tied to a fence, and left to die in the freezing cold night temperatures. He was found the next morning but died from his injuries six days later, shocking the nation and serving as a wake-up call to me.

Matthew and I were the same age and grew up in similar circumstances. We were raised in blue collar-oriented cities with populations of less than 50,000 people, the oldest of two children born to happily married parents, friendly in nature, and teased by our classmates. Prior to Matthew's death I had never heard of a gay person being murdered, much less one so brutal in nature. Seeing someone so like myself be attacked and killed with such violence and hatred shook me to my core; it made me painfully aware that this could happen to me.

After Matthew's murder, I dialed back any outward appearances of gayness and stifled any desire for overt self-expression. As a person who has never been confrontational, I saw this as a means of self-preservation. I did as little as possible to draw attention to myself, and once again leaned into my "straight" attributes. I became more conscious of what I said and who I said it in front of, stopped wearing any jewelry, and adopted a uniform of jeans, shorts, sneakers, ballcaps, and t-shirts, all in muted tones. I was not ashamed of being gay, but I was afraid of being accosted for it and the fears of childhood ridicule bubbled to the surface once more. This fear is what led to the creation of *Hiding from a Fear of the Expected*.



Plate 5: Hiding from a Fear of the Expected

Though the image is shot from the nose down, by removing my eyes from the image I have removed any trace of personality and life, effectively removing my identity, which is how I felt when I leaned into my “straight” attributes to hide my queerness. This is also reinforced by my being positioned behind a door, peering off to the side in a defensive posture. The addition of a pearl necklace and painted nails are used as embellishments to acknowledge the presence of my queerness but are subtle in nature to show that I was trying to minimize their impact and obviousness.

CHAPTER 3: IDENTITY & FINDING PLACE

Joining my fraternity did have some positive aspects to it, but the experience was not without its detriments. Being a member of a socially visible group, you persistently live within a spotlight and are expected to uphold certain behaviors and appearances. Though expulsion from the fraternity was rare, there were still standards by which one could be expelled. One such reason was for conduct unbecoming of a gentleman. Seemingly innocent on the surface, the reason is loaded with underlying tension and threat. No qualifications were given as to what defined gentlemanly conduct, or what could violate it. Who was to decide? Would engaging in homosexual behavior constitute conduct unbecoming of a gentleman? Lord Byron and Oscar Wilde might disagree.

There was also a pressure to fit in. I wanted the social status that came with being in a fraternity while also having gay friends I could escape to when needed. Being so insecure and unsure of my own sexuality, it was difficult to find this balance. I enjoyed hanging out with my gay friends in private, where I could let my guard down and be free to be me, but I also saw them as too flamboyant in public and would keep my distance for fear of a guilt by association. One of these friends had rushed the fraternity at the same time I did, and I later found out that he was denied acceptance because he was so open about his sexuality. I was also more cognizant of my mannerisms, making sure to walk more upright, with a stiffer wrist, no hands on the hips, and even making sure I enunciated my words to avoid any perception of a lisp. Recognizing what I was doing then, and its toxicity, became the inspiration for *Masc Drag*.



Plate 6: Masc Drag

Portraying myself in decidedly masculine attire – a white t-shirt and overalls – I used this as a way that emphasizes the falsity in this idea of masculinity. Using new, never worn overalls with the sticker still on them, I am illustrating how this idealized masculine image is just a façade, for show, and that behind it I have more delicate features I try to mask. By drinking tea from a dainty, floral porcelain cup with my pinky out, in the privacy of a bedroom, acknowledges this, while the heavy, masculine wood furniture combined with the lace lamp, lighter colors, and chair I am sitting in serve as signifiers to this internalized dichotomy and struggle.

The experience with my fraternity caused me to repress any dramatic outward expressions of identity that might go against the ideas of what masculinity were. Men could only wear certain fabrics, colors, and styles, and anything outside of this rigid parameter would be a threat to one's own masculinity. If men did engage in any indulgences, it was done in a secretive or minimalistic manner. Though silk has historically been seen as a status symbol of luxury, in our modern era it has been relegated to subtle embellishment such as pocket squares or jacket lining (Rashed).

Silk was not the only indulgence that men were restricted from openly partaking in. Self-care and pampering are two other areas where society has placed restrictions on men. Luxuries

such as skin care, nail polish, manicures, pedicures – anything remotely associated with spas or pampering – have traditionally been seen as emasculating and threats to manhood and yet some communities that embrace hyper-masculinity such as the mafioso embrace such extravagances. For these men, who exude power and are seen as the epitome of manliness, such things are seen as status symbols to project their wealth and power, things they can afford that others cannot.

When I created *To Luxuriate (Hidden Among Layers)* and *To Luxuriate (Behind Closed Doors)*, it was with these ideas in mind. In the former I contrast the notions of uniforms men wear and the visibility in which they are worn. In the latter I take the idea that if men pamper themselves, even with something as innocuous as a bubble bath, it is typically done within the confines of their own home, where even their spouses or family may not see. By contrasting athletic attire, something people see in a multitude of public spaces, with silk boxers and nylon socks, it reinforces the idea that if men do choose to embrace soft, delicate textures such as these it must be done in a way that is hidden from public view.



Plate 7: *To Luxuriate (Hidden Among Layers)*



Plate 8: To Luxuriate (Behind Closed Doors)

Even the LGBTQ community has its own standards on what is acceptable behavior and appearances, which fuels an abundance of intra-community discrimination. While there have always been divisions within the larger queer community (gays vs. lesbians, active vs. passive resistance), the community at large has traditionally been uniform in its mission of acceptance by mainstream society and a desire for basic human rights. Some have accused the mission of being based on erasure and conforming to heteronormativity, and perhaps it is the granting of these rights – civil protections, marriage, openly serving in the military – that has caused the community to splinter into divisions. Some have an idyllic perspective: now more than ever we can blend in and acclimate with mainstream society, and everything is A-Okay. How naïve. Others see how far we still must go, both in mainstream society and within our own culture.

Despite years of fighting toxic masculinity, it continues to run rampant within our community. A large portion of gay men put added emphasis on traditionally masculine, “straight acting” features and attributes, especially a sculpted gym physique, to the point of belittling and denigrating anyone who does not conform to these standards. “Masc for Masc” is all too common of a refrain seen on social media profiles, as well as the exclusionary, racist, and fatphobic line “No Fats, No Fems, No Asians.” Since they are in the majority, the most egregious offenders of these attitudes and actions are white men, the same ones whose profiles are filled with platitudes about being body positive, embracing all races, and being friendly to all while only posting photos of themselves in exclusive places with other conventionally attractive, moderately built white men.

Those on top will claim that identity is dead only insofar as this releases them from any responsibility for their words or actions. All over the internet, gay personals websites valorize “straight acting” as a universal value that is both desirable and positive, linking it to a set of norms that eerily imitate moral code in religious law (thou shalt be butch). In bar scenes, men stand in lock-step formation, patrolling the behavior of those who stray outside the borders of masculine performance, imposing fear of social deportation. (Abbas 34)

I experienced a lot of these attitudes firsthand living in a big city. Having much greater access to so many gay bars and a gay neighborhood afforded me the ability to be more social and to meet a wider variety of people. I enjoy being around people and felt that this would finally allow me to find my tribe. As I explored these gay spaces, however, I felt a growing pressure by the community to conform to a certain aesthetic to be accepted. I quickly saw who the popular gays were and realized how much I was not like them.

After two years living there, I began working in a gay leather bar. I was drawn to the hyper-masculinity of the space, in part because those were the type of men I had come to be attracted to and it was where I felt like I was supposed to belong. Though I did not recognize it at the time, the environment was rife with toxic attitudes as it was still very much a bastion of the leather/Levi/denim crowd where men referred to each other as “pal” and “buddy,” drinks consisted of something from a tap or alcohol and one mixer, and music had to be by male artists and fall within the rock genre or anything rock adjacent. God forbid you referred to another man as “girl” or “she.” If men in this space did drag, it was as a farce and definitely not as a legitimate drag queen. I gradually found the environment to be suffocating as it, like my fraternity, conflicted with how I felt on the inside. I was fortunate, though, to see the attitudes shift during my ten years working there. The culture shifted from being a decidedly “leather bar” to an all-encompassing safe space for queer people of all stripes who felt that they did not fit in elsewhere. It was still a home for social misfits and outcasts, just without a specified gender code. My experiences working there led to the creation of *Transmogrification*.



Plate 9: Transmogrification

The photograph is a display of the layers that we all encompass and the slow embrace thereof. Between a façade of male attire and a manly, hairy chest lies a pink silk lace camisole. Holding the shirt open, I am exposing myself to the world in open defiance of these prescribed gender binaries while openly acknowledging the soft, delicate side within. Looking away from the camera, though, signifies my discomfort with being so vulnerable and exposed. I chose the title for this piece based on its definition – the act of changing appearance or form, either in a fantastic or grotesque way – and how people perceive the confrontation of gender binaries.

Influences & Affirmations

The confrontation and questioning of gender binaries are key to the work of three artists who influenced my work. The first, Lissa Rivera, uses her partner as the subject in her main work,

Beautiful Boy. The work evolved from a simple confession between friends: “On the subway one evening, my friend shared that he had worn women’s clothing almost exclusively in college, but after graduation struggled to navigate a world that seemed both newly accepting and yet inherently reviling of male displays of femininity.” Photography allowed Rivera’s friend and now partner a safe space to explore this side of himself. “By presenting my partner within the lineage of great beauties and populating the media with our images, we are reclaiming our voice in what is attractive and beautiful” (Rivera). Seeing how Rivera portrayed her subject was inspiring to me because it showed how comfortable yet vulnerable someone could be exploring such a private and intimate experience. The facial expressions her subject made spoke to me, as if telling me personally that it was ok to explore the softer, more delicate side of myself, anyone else be damned.



Figures 3 & 4: Images from Lissa Rivera’s series *Beautiful Boy*

Rivera’s partner, who identifies as heterosexual and uses they/them pronouns, has a luxury that I do not, namely softer, more delicate features and a lithe body. This affords them the ability to explore their femininity with greater ease as they can find a wider range of clothing that fits them. Clothing is not the only way to express a differentiation in gender, though; subtle accessories are just as important. Increasingly men are indulging in pedicures and manicures and wearing rings

more elaborate than a simple band. One of the most popular accessories to recently play with gender expression has been the use of pearl necklaces.

Men and pearls have a long, complicated history. Prized for their beauty and being so rare, English nobility such as King Henry VIII and George Villiers, politician and lover of King James VI and I, wore necklaces and clothing with pearls sewn in them while Indian nobility from the 16th to 20th centuries were portrayed wearing opulent, layered strands of pearls that sometimes reached to their waists. This ornamentation suggested clout, opulence, and power, and still does to this day. How a pearl is used is what has separated the genders for some time. For men, it was an embellishment within their status symbol accessories, especially as they veered away from wearing complicated or fancy jewelry, while women continued using them as means of personal adornment and for precious objects. In recent years, this separation has become increasingly blurred (Haramis).



Figures 5-7: King Henry VIII, c. 1540; George Villiers, c. 1626; Sir Yadavindra Singh, Maharaja of Patiala, 1928

Today, celebrities across various genres, including musicians Harry Styles, Gucci Mane, and the Jonas Brothers, Formula 1 driver Lewis Hamilton, and baseball players Jackson Olsen and Ryan Cox have openly worn pearls in public, ranging from a simple earring to elaborate necklaces, while multiple fashion designers have used them as accessories on their male runway models. The

neck is a largely unadorned part of the male body, so any embellishment placed thereon is going to draw attention. Pearls not only show that you are interested in fashion, but they can be used as a personal statement. Interestingly, the recent coronavirus pandemic may have helped expedite this dissolving of gender boundaries. According to Luke Raymond, senior men's wear editor at Farfetch, "Men were empowered to take risks and try something new after a period of lockdown dressing. Necklaces are an easy, approachable, and symbolic way to do that" (qtd. in Lazazzera).

This form of expression has become so trendy that even everyday men are wearing them, real or fake. I was out at a bar one night with some female friends and made a comment to one of them about how more and more men are wearing this accessory, not just gay men. One then approached a guy wearing a pearl necklace and commented on it, pointedly asked if it was a "gay thing," to which he very tersely replied, "No! I wear it...just because."

We have seen, in recent years, a heady unraveling of what constitutes men's dressing; with that, the very illusion of manhood has received a drubbing, too. But a man in pearls, unlike, say, a man in a skirt, doesn't defy gender so much as buttress a binary. It's not drag when Troye Sivan or A\$AP Rocky performs a song wearing one of these necklaces. In fact, it doesn't really feel that femme — even as these men are referencing, and then subverting, a symbolic kind of ladylike primness. If anything, the flouting of whatever it means to "dress like a man" suggests an act of expressive alpha sex appeal, in the same way that David Bowie was at his most virile when he put on eyeliner and a skintight striped "spacesuit" to become Ziggy Stardust. Pearls — hard yet smooth, timeless yet trendy, iconic yet rare — offer an introduction to style that allows the wearer to have it both ways. (Haramis)

In exploring my feminine side and ways to challenge toxic ideas of masculinity, I did not want to rely on clothing as I have no interest in wearing dresses or other clothing society has deemed female-oriented. Instead, I am more interested in textures and the accessory, simple embellishments that, when combined with a freshly shaved head, make me feel pretty. In *I Am She Who Adorn'd Herself*, I use adornment as a means of accomplishing this.



Plate 10: I Am She Who Adorn'd Herself

For this photo, I positioned myself in an intimate setting, shirtless and clutching a string of pearls, staring at the camera in a somewhat seductive manner while surrounded by pictures that give way to this challenge. A closer inspection will reveal pictures of a Victorian-era man, industrial buildings and homes, a car crash, and myself at a wedding, contrasted with more softer images such as a Victorian-era postcard, a floral still-life in an elaborate frame, and a small, colorful painting. All these elements, including the title of the image, combine to show the dichotomy of this struggle, of trying to balance feminine adornment while surrounded by vestiges of masculinity.

Another artist who I drew inspiration from and uses ornamentation in their work is Evan Benally Atwood and his project *Cowboy Juice*. He describes this series as “an ongoing theme of

reclamation of land, body, queerness, sexuality, [and] growth.” Atwood uses a playful combination of male and female clothing in his work to engage his viewers and to question what gender is while asking who gets to decide this. His use of a black cowboy hat and a female chastity belt draw stark contrasts to one another while also using articles of clothing that at first glance may not be what we think them to be.

Atwood establishes a clear connection to his heritage using ornamentation, clothing, and the locations he chooses for his photographs. Aside from a bright red shirt in a few photos, he also avoids using loud, bright colors, letting the content speak for itself without flashy distraction. While there are some close-up shots, several of his photos are shot at a distance, obscuring his features, while some are shot on black and white film with a high grain resolution, further hiding his identity.



Figures 8 & 9: Photographs from Atwood's series *Cowboy Juice*

When I first saw Atwood's work, I was interested in seeing how someone with more masculine features like me was using gender expression in their work. One piece that really struck me was one where he wears a red leather chastity belt, adorned with silver chains, over a pair of black men's briefs, black knee-high boots with a pronounced heel, a soft sweater hanging off one shoulder, black cowboy hat, and subtle blue eyeshadow, all in front of a backdrop of a cloudy sky.

The photo speaks volumes about choices and layering, especially his decision to wear a chastity belt over men's underwear.

In another photo, Atwood is nude leaning over a stool, in a side profile, wearing only a black cowboy hat and a long, elaborate silver earring. A small gold table with a candle, powder tin, and flowers in a clear vase are the only things separating us from his nude form. Resting on his arms with his wrists crossed, Atwood stares at the camera with a look that is a combination of confrontation and vulnerability.

Atwood's work was an inspiration behind *Subtle Embellishments Make Me Feel Pretty*. By portraying myself nude, I have chosen to expose my own raw vulnerabilities, literal scars, and all. Through the simple act of clasping a necklace, I am actively engaging with the viewer as they witness my application of an embellishment, but by facing away from the camera I am also engaging in an act of concealment and conflict. I have denied the viewer the opportunity to witness my facial expression as I apply this piece of jewelry while also denying them the knowledge of what I am applying – is it a simple gold chain or something more elaborate like a necklace with a pendant? The combination of masculine features such as my body hair and broad shoulders interact with these feminine embellishments to enhance the visual conflict.



Plate 11: *Subtle Embellishments Make Me Feel Pretty*

The third artist who I drew inspiration from is Jess T. Dugan, who uses portraiture to capture the spirit and essence of their subjects who are often older members of the trans and gender non-conforming communities. Their work “explores the complexities of personhood, relationships, desire, love, and family [and] informed by their own life experiences, including their identity as a queer and nonbinary person” (Dugan). The portraits are raw and intimate and include as many solo portraits as there are couples. Their work gives visibility and validation to a segment of the LGBTQ community that is often overlooked and disregarded.



Figures 10 & 11: Self-portrait (blue room) and JD & Steve, from *Look At Me Like You Love Me*

Dugan’s work also explores the rigidity of gender binaries that are still prevalent in the overall LGBTQ community. Even as we fight for acceptance, we still impose a binary system that eschews anyone who does not fall into one category or the other. If you claim to be bisexual, you are seen as confused or have not “figured it out” yet. The same if you are gender non-conforming. Binaries are something created by society and have been instilled in us for centuries. Good vs. bad. Right vs. wrong. Top vs. bottom. Man vs. woman. The list is endless and leaves no room for gray areas. Binaries have also been used to morally and culturally subjugate women, minorities, or any

other less powerful group since they were first created: if men are strong, women are weak; if men are rational, women are irrational; if a woman is not chaste, she is a whore; if the white man is civilized, the African is a savage; if a straight man is masculine, a gay man is feminine (Lobo).

Throughout the creation of this body of work, I had several introspective conversations with myself to understand my long-suppressed feelings and to accept who I am. I do not consider myself gender non-conforming, but rather leaning more towards non-binary. Researching Dugan and their work has helped me acknowledge and accept that I do not fall within a strictly defined ‘male’ binary. Their subjects show both vulnerability and resiliency, which I found powerful and inspiring and gave me the courage to fully embrace the masculine and feminine sides to myself. This also gave me a better understanding of the Native American tradition of Two-Spirit people, individuals who combined elements of both the male and female into their identity.

Dugan’s work has also helped me recognize my fraught relationship with age. I do not feel or look my age (thanks Mom!), but songs or cultural references will occasionally remind me how old I actually am. Despite being a non-traditional student, I am surrounded by young, vibrant people which helps me forget how old I am. At the same time, all too often I am reminded on apps and other gay-themed sites that I am well into what is derisively called “gay death” – the idea that gay men are no longer desirable after the age of 30. Dugan’s work helps to dispel this myth, that one can be loved and attractive as they get older and worked to help me more fully accept myself as a queer person and older gay man. Seeing the confidence that Dugan draws out of her portrait subjects, combined with their use of moody, intimate natural light in their still-life images gave me the inspiration behind *Debunking Phallacies*.



Plate 12: Debunking Phallacies

I wanted to use a space devoid of extraneous ornamentation to draw attention to myself and the more subtle embellishments I chose. Using a simple curtain that was already in the space as a means of diffusing the midday light allowed me to play with shadows. By positioning myself within the light coming from the barely open curtain, the viewer's attention is drawn to the pearl necklace, the painted nails, and the sheer nylon stockings. Even the basketball shorts, though commonly identified as 'male' attired, have a soft, somewhat silken feel to them. By facing the camera, I am engaging with the viewer in a confrontational manner, saying that this is me, whether you like it or not.

CHAPTER 4: CODE-SWITCHING AND MASKING

As I floated aimlessly among various social groups growing up and into adulthood, I was exploring different alternatives to my identity in a passive way, more out of a reaction to whatever situation I found myself in rather than seeking out any specific group. I would adjust my mannerisms and appearances as a means of blending in so as not to draw attention to myself, practices I would later come to identify as code-switching and masking.

Though the two can overlap in principle, the differences between the two are subtle, nonetheless. Encyclopedia Britannica defines code-switching as the “process of shifting from one linguistic code (a language or dialect) to another, depending on the social context or conversational setting” (Morrison). Code-switching is an action performed by minority communities, especially the African American community, as they navigate between their community and an Anglo-centric society. This is by no means isolated to ethnic communities as any repressed or minority community will often engage in this behavior. Code-switching is performed as an act of self-preservation to conform to one’s surroundings, oftentimes enacted in the workplace to sound more professional or at home to be more comfortable. Code-switching is not entirely linguistic, though, and can be performed through gestures such as a handshake versus a hug (Johnson).

In their article on the costs of code-switching, Courtney L. McCluney and others identified the main reasons that African Americans code-switch, which can also be seen as the same reasons that members of the LGBTQ community engage in similar practices. Adjusting for the queer community, the reasons they identified are:

downplaying membership in a stigmatized [...] group helps increase perceptions of professionalism and the likelihood of being hired; avoiding negative stereotypes

associated with [queer] identity (e.g. gay men are effeminate or predators; lesbians are butch man-haters; non-binary are confused and want to recruit children) helps [queer] employees be seen as leaders; and expressing shared interests with members of dominant groups promotes similarity with powerful organizational members, which raises the change of promotions because individuals tend to affiliate with people they perceive as similar. (McCluney)

Masking, on the other hand, is a more external act of adjusting one's physical appearance or behavior to conform to the majority. This can be seen in acts such as standing more upright with squared shoulders, giving a firmer handshake, and altering our wardrobe. Many male members of the LGBTQ community, myself included, are painfully aware of the stereotype of gay men as mincing, prancing "fairies," being called a sissy, and seen as generally effeminate in nature, such as Jack McFarland in *Will & Grace*, portrayed by Sean Hayes, or Armand and Albert Goldman in *The Birdcage*, portrayed by Robin Williams and Nathan Lane, respectively. As such, gay men will often perform these acts of masking in everyday, mainstream society to deflect any perceived bias and to be taken more seriously.

The acts of masking that I have undertaken for all these years were meant to be acts of self-preservation. I utilized them to protect myself from a fear of continued abuse from my childhood as well as perceived threats of violence against myself, but they became a crutch and stifled any opportunity for growth within myself, ultimately becoming acts of self-sabotage. By staying afraid and hidden, I continued to suppress and ignore my authentic self, even as it continued to cry out louder and louder to be free. I knew that it was there, and in the privacy of my own home, where I knew I was safe, I allowed that side to come out.

Perceptions of Self & By Others

Throughout this journey of self-discovery, I have been aware of and acknowledge my perceived “straightness.” Being 6’2” in height with a thick, sturdy build and speaking with a relatively deep voice, I have been called intimidating and imposing. It does not help that I often cross my arms and was once asked at a bar if I was someone’s bodyguard. Friends who are more effeminate have told me that I am lucky to have such masculine features and that I did not fully realize the advantage that this gave me. I had never considered this “lucky” before, but instead saw these physical attributes as a convenient way to deflect assumptions of my sexuality away while also seeing them as something of a conflicting burden: I want people to know that I am gay, but not be seen as gay.

In trying to navigate mainstream, heterosexual culture, I have found it difficult to discern who could be a potential mate. I do not have what is known as ‘gaydar’ (a portmanteau of ‘gay’ and ‘radar,’ meaning to be able to know if someone is gay without them telling you), and I do not tend to set other people’s gaydar off, either, so it has been hard to know who to pursue and who to open myself up to. I have often found myself drawn to other men like me who were navigating a pseudo-closeted existence of acknowledging their sexuality privately or among other like-minded individuals but not outwardly in public. Yet these are the same men who have told me that I was too manly or not manly enough, which only added to my own sense of self-confusion: did I need to dial it up or dial it back?

Despite all of this, I still engage in code-switching and masking behaviors from that inherent fear of being judged, accosted, or not taken seriously by it. These behaviors have become so ingrained that I often do not even realize I am doing them. When I do acknowledge them, I will ask myself if it is worth it in terms of my own mental health while wondering whether people

know that I am putting on a show for them. This fear is what led to the creation of *Subtle Shifts Are Not as Subtle as We Think*.



Plate 13: Subtle Shifts Are Not as Subtle as We Think They Are

In this photo, I used a backdrop to create a scene within a library, a place that has special significance to me. As a historian and bibliophile, I have spent a lot of time in libraries and museums doing research and reading. I am also acutely aware that these fields can be notoriously conservative. Using a backdrop enables the viewer to see that something is not quite right, that something is seemingly different or out of place. I wear a shirt and tie in the photo to play the part of belonging while partially hiding my face behind a lace fan. The fan is a nod to the softer, delicate side of myself, an allusion to my homosexuality. By being lace, the fan is made of a material that is see-through, so that it is not effective at hiding anything. Combined with the fact that the fan is only obscuring a smaller portion of my face leans into the question of whether I am hiding as much as I think I am or not.

Reconciliation and Moving Forward

As I begin to emerge from this veil of fear and uncertainty and into the world more confident in myself and who I am, I must begin a healing process whereby I have to deconstruct my conditioning, breaking it down into manageable pieces to understand how to combat and come to terms with it. I have begun to acknowledge and accept that some days, it is ok to want to feel pretty instead of handsome. It is ok to engage in acts of self-expression that validate me because in the end it is ultimately my decision in how I choose to feel and express myself, no one else's. It is this reconciliation of my queer expression with my mainstream interests that will prove the most challenging.

Over the past 46 years, I have been taught the parameters by which a man must live, act, and present himself to be successful and taken seriously. By this point they are ingrained, and I may not be able to fully shake them all off. One of the first steps to this, though, is the realization and acceptance that all these things do not have to be compartmentalized and can live in harmony with one another. For years I have lived under the assumption that these two aspects of myself – my inner queer identity and my outer masculine façade – must live independently of one another. Now, I embrace them and am happier with myself more than I ever have been. This joy was the inspiration behind *Binaries*.



Plate 14: Binaries

In this photo I used a more masculine setting but one that is still intimate. Portraying myself wearing a union suit, legs crossed in a playful, coyly flirty manner, and wearing nail polish I show that I am embracing these dueling binaries within me. Interestingly, the union suit has its own history of dueling gender identity. It was first invented in the late-1860's as an alternative to women's corsets and bustles and was called the chemiloon, or "ladies' hygienic underdress." It was made of flannel and embraced by the dress reform movement, though most women were reluctant to embrace it and men, especially those in the media, assailed the dress reformers as "ugly, cross-dressing, even [insane], as a way to dissuade other women from participating." This did not stop men from embracing its warm and practical comfort for their own use, though. Those who wore it also avoided criticism of wearing "women's undergarments" as the design was so similar to men's one-piece knit bathing suits of the time. Ultimately women abandoned the use of union suits as it became too difficult to push back against social conventions of dress at the time while it became a staple of men's wardrobes for the next fifty years (Komar).



Figure 12: 1879 ad in *Harper's Bazaar* for women and children's union suits



Figure 13: 1911 ad for S. T. Coopers and Sons' Kenosha Klosed Krotch union suit

As I move forward embracing my new self, I am reminded of a line from the 1972 movie *Cabaret*, directed by American choreographer Bob Fosse and starring Liza Minelli as the main character Sally Bowles. During a spoken dialogue at the beginning of the song “Mein Herr,” Bowles describes herself by saying, “I am special. I am an unusual. I am scented. I am sexy. And I am divinely decadent!” (Kander). A mantra, indeed.

CONCLUSION

Debunking Phallacies is a series of photographs designed for both me and my viewers. As I became more comfortable with placing myself in front of the camera, this body of work evolved into a diaristic means of self-exploration and coming to terms with my authentic self so that I may move forward while also inviting people to engage in a dialogue with it. The purpose of this dialogue is to ask questions about how we perceive gender and how we choose to express ourselves. Are we being honest and showing our real, true selves or are we posting a manufactured façade based upon what society expects of us? It is my hope that this work inspires viewers to discover what their personal myth is, to go on a journey of self-exploration and question what society has dictated to them. If we all begin to debunk these fallacies, then perhaps we can achieve a state where real equality exists, and people are free to be their authentic selves without fear of reprisal or repercussion.

REFERENCES

- Abbas, Ali. "Death By Masculinity." *Why Are Faggots So Afraid of Faggots?*, edited by Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore, AK Press, Oakland, CA, 2012, pp. 33–38.
- Anderson, Eric. *Inclusive Masculinity: The Changing Nature of Masculinities*. Routledge, 2012.
- Armitage, Hugh. "The Only 7 Ways You Could Be LGBTQ+ In '90s Movies." *Digital Spy*, 4 July 2018, <http://www.digitalspy.com/movies/a860896/lgbtq-gay-stereotypes-90s-movies/>.
- Atwood, Evan Benally. <http://www.evanbenallyatwood.com>.
- Berger, Maurice, et al. *Constructing Masculinity*. Routledge, 1995.
- Bobowicz, Joseph. "Subversive? Dangerous? Boring?: How the Red Carpet Became a Barometer for Modern Masculinity." *The Independent*, Independent Digital News and Media, 19 Mar. 2023, www.independent.co.uk/life-style/fashion/menswear-red-carpet-fashion-gender-b2302022.html.
- Boot, Chris. "Gay Men Play: Self-Representation, Sex, and Photography Now." *Aperture*, no. 195, 2009, pp. 36–41. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24473431>.
- Brett. "The Decline of Male Space." *The Art of Manliness*, 26 Sept. 2021, <http://www.artofmanliness.com/character/behavior/the-decline-of-male-space/>.
- Courtenay, Will H. "Constructions of masculinity and their influence on men's well-being: A theory of gender and health." *Social Science & Medicine*, vol. 50, no. 10, 2000, pp. 1385–1401, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0277-9536\(99\)00390-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0277-9536(99)00390-1).
- Crocetti, Elisabetta. "Identity formation in adolescence: The dynamic of forming and consolidating identity commitments." *Child Development Perspectives*, vol. 11, no. 2, 20 Feb. 2017, pp. 145–150, <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12226>.
- Dire Straits. *Brothers in Arms*. Vertigo Records, 1985.
- Dugan, Jess T. <http://www.jessdugan.com>.
- Dugan, Jess T., and Vanessa Fabbre. *To Survive on This Shore: Photographs and Interviews with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Older Adults*. Kehrer, 2019.
- Flanagan, Bill. *Written in My Soul: Rock's Great Songwriters Talk about Creating Their Music*. Contemporary Books, 1987.
- Goldberg, Herb. *The Hazards of Being Male: Surviving the Myth of Masculine Privilege*. New American Library, 1976.

Harrington, Carol. "What is 'toxic masculinity' and why does it matter?" *Men and Masculinities*, vol. 24, no. 2, 17 July 2020, pp. 345–352, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184x20943254>.

Heintz, Suzanne. Personal communication, 17 January 2024.

Holden, Madeleine. "The Exhausting Work of LGBTQ Code-Switching." *LGBTQ People Are Forced to Constantly Code-Switch and Its' Exhausting*, 12 Aug. 2019, <http://www.vice.com/en/article/evj47w/the-exhausting-work-of-lgbtq-code-switching>.

"HUSL Library: A Brief History of Civil Rights in the United States: The 1990s, 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell,' and Doma." *The 1990s, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," and DOMA - A Brief History of Civil Rights in the United States - HUSL Library at Howard University School of Law*, 6 Jan. 2023, <http://www.library.law.howard.edu/civilrightshistory/lgbtq/90s>.

Kander, John, and Fred Ebb. *Cabaret*. Universal Music Group, 1972.

Keller, Alice, and Terri Ottaway. "Centuries of Opulence: Jewels of India." *Gemological Institute Of America*, 11 Oct. 2017, www.gia.edu/jewels-of-india.

Komar, Marlen. "How 19th-Century Activists Ditched Corsets for One-Piece Long Underwear." *Smithsonian.Com*, Smithsonian Institution, 19 Jan. 2021, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/how-19th-century-activists-ditched-corsets-for-one-piece-long-underwear-180976774/>.

Kris, Ernst. "The personal myth a problem in psychoanalytic technique." *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, vol. 4, no. 4, Aug. 1956, pp. 653–681, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000306515600400406>.

Lobo, Gregory J. "Thinking Beyond the Binary." *Medium*, Humanities For The People, 12 Dec. 2023, <http://www.medium.com/humanities-for-the-people/thinking-beyond-the-binary-a1bb1b84dcdf>.

Mega, Hugo. "How Gay Men Are Endorsing Toxic Masculinity Without Knowing!" *KET Magazine Brussels*, 3 May 2022, <http://ket.brussels/2022/04/30/how-toxic-masculinity-has-become-evermore-present-in-the-gay-community/>.

Meyer, James Sampson, et al. *The Double: Identity and Difference in Art Since 1900*. National Gallery of Art in Association with Princeton University Press, 2022.

Morrison, Carlos D.. "code-switching". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2 Feb. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/code-switching>.

"Myth Definition & Meaning." *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/myth>.

Pardo, Alona. *Masculinities: Liberation through Photography*. Prestel, 2020.

- Peake, Amber. “‘Queer-Pas-Gay’ Identity Meaning Explored As Bell Hooks Dies Aged 69.” *The Focus*, 17 Dec. 2021, <http://www.thefocus.news/culture/bell-hooks-queer-pas-gay/>.
- Plummer, David. *One of the Boys: Masculinity, Homophobia, and Modern Manhood*. Harrington Park, 2000.
- Rashed, Kareem. “Stylish Guys Everywhere Are Slipping Into Silk. Here’s Why.” *Robb Report*, Robb Report, 15 July 2022, <http://www.robbreport.com/style/menswear/silk-shirts-tailoring-more-1234726494/>.
- Reed, Lou. *Transformer*. RCA Records, 1972.
- Rivera, Lissa. <http://www.lissarivera.com>.
- Rogin, Ali. “How Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell Has Affected LGBTQ Service Members, 10 Years after Repeal.” *PBS*, Public Broadcasting Service, 23 Dec. 2020, <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/how-dont-ask-dont-tell-has-affected-lgbtq-service-members-10-years-after-repeal>.
- Sánchez, Francisco J., et al. “Reported effects of masculine ideals on gay men.” *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, vol. 10, no. 1, Jan. 2009, pp. 73–87, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013513>.
- Schoenberg, B. Mark. *Growing Up Male: The Psychology of Masculinity*. Bergin and Garvey, 1993.
- Sexton, Jared Yates. *The Man They Wanted Me to Be: Toxic Masculinity and a Crisis of Our Own Making*. Counterpoint, 2020.
- Sycamore, Matt Bernstein. *Nobody Passes: Rejecting the Rules of Gender and Conformity*. Seal Press, 2006.
- Volandes, Stellene. “History of Anne Boleyn’s B Necklace.” *Town and Country*, Hearst Digital Media, 4 Mar. 2019, <http://www.townandcountrymag.com/style/jewelry-and-watches/a26622469/anne-boleyn-jewels-balenciaga-b-necklace/>.
- Wolbergs, Benjamin, et al. *New Queer Photography: Focus on the Margins*. Kettler, 2020.

APPENDIX 1: ADDITIONAL IMAGES IN THESIS EXHIBITION



Plate 15: Among Other Uniques, I Still Feel Alone



Plate 16: False Simplicity of Expectation



Plate 17: Pay No Attention to the Man Behind the Curtain



Plate 18: Twinkle Toes



Plate 19: Veneers



Plate 20: Your Son, the Seamstress

APPENDIX II: IMAGES OF THESIS EXHIBITION



Plate 21: Beginning of Thesis Exhibition in Wellington B. Gray Gallery



Plate 22: North View of Thesis Exhibition in Wellington B. Gray Gallery



Plate 23: South View of Thesis Exhibition in Wellington B. Gray Gallery



Plate 24: Group of Selected Images from Exhibition in Wellington B. Gray Gallery



Plate 25: Pair of Selected Images from Exhibition in Wellington B. Gray Gallery



Plate 26: Pair of Selected Images from Exhibition in Wellington B. Gray Gallery

