

Questions & Answers

"Man is a highly contested phenomenon, writes Doran George, one of the contributors to *Self-Organizing Men*." So many of us seem to be searching for that elusive perfect man, or struggle to define what, exactly, in some perfect definition, masculinity is.

This elusive search results in a hierarchy of identities, with bio-men on top, then post-operative transsexual men, then pre-operative transsexual men, and so on.

But I now personally find that approach bankrupt. In the end, there will always be someone who is "more of a man" than I. But for years I characterized myself as somehow "less than a man" or a man so different from bio-men.

Then I experienced a life changing moment with another white man - which I discuss in my introduction - where I came to understand that I am so much more like other men, than I am not. Out of this understanding, I created *Self-Organizing Men*.

So I wanted to dialogue with other folks about the many paradoxes and conundrums of masculinity.

One paradox several contributors address is the increase in male privilege typically associated with FtMs is often more about racial privilege than gender privilege. Or, put more in the fashion of *Self-Organizing Men*, the rise in privilege experienced by white FtMs is inextricably linked as much to race as gender. They cannot be pulled apart. Any attempt to do so results in false understandings of the realities of our lives, and also results in a kind of oppression olympics.

The most important conundrum we examine — indeed, the heart of *Self-Organizing Men* — is this idea that somehow, someday, we will find one single, neat identity where all our rough edges fit.

What is Self-Organizing Men about?

What are some of those paradoxes and conundrums?

What does the title mean?

Self-organizing derives from the term *autopoiesis*. Literally meaning self-organizing, I'm using it here to describe the constant assessing and reassessing of ourselves we do in this world.

The simplest example of human self-organization is when you burn your hand on the stove or iron. Unless you want to get burned again, you've learned from that experience not to put your hand on those objects. You received feedback from your environment and modified your behavior.

As I began hormone replacement therapy, I became aware that in many ways I became very privileged as a white, heterosexual man. Yet I am still part of the LGBT community, but as a transsexual man, I am relegated to a kind of quasi second-class status. So I am both oppressed and privileged in the same body, some times at the same time.

So I began to wonder how I might make sense of all these new inputs and new understandings I was, and am still, making.

The title assumes that humans are intelligent, dynamic, self-organizing systems; that we are conscious-aware and moving through time and space.

What makes your book different?

My book is different for several reasons. Any one who felt comfortable using the term man or masculine or had some relationship with masculinity could submit something to the anthology. **Consequently, we have works by ftms, queer-identified trans masculine people, queer/gay bio man, a high femme drag king and a non-op ftm parent who likes his female body because it gave him his child.** I made no judgements about body parts or body configurations.

Second, I have authors from the U.S., Canada, the U.K. and Australia. Rarely are books printed in the United States with such diversity.

I've included theoretical essays, poetry, political cartoons, transgender stories, experimental prose.

Also, one of the foundations of this book is that we all have a relationship to masculinity and that bio men struggle as much with their masculinity as FtMs.

There are contradictory stories in this book. For some guys, they are born the way they are. For others, origin stories are more complicated.