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# Passing, Protesting, and the Arts of Resistance: Infiltrating the Ritual Space of Blood Donation

Jeffrey A. Bennett

*This essay critically engages challenges made against the federally mandated deferral policies which prohibit “men who have sex with other men” from donating blood. I argue that “passing” and “protest” are dialogically dependent on one another as two separate but related tactics of resistance. Drawing on interview materials from men who have both “passed” and “protested,” the essay explores the implications of this dialogical tension for understanding stranger-relationality, enacting civic identity, and disciplining queer bodies.*

*Keywords: Passing; Stranger-Relationality; Blood Donation; Resistance; Identity*

The act of donating blood has long symbolized an altruistic relationship of connectedness among citizens in a polity.<sup>1</sup> Almost universally regarded as a volunteer endeavor, giving blood is a simple deed that takes little time and effort, usually in places of communal import. As a performative act of civic engagement, blood donation functions simultaneously as an intimate bond between strangers and a public ritual which affirms civic identity. Blood donation is, to borrow Michael Warner’s phrase, an “intimate theater” that constitutes publics and shapes minute dimensions of subjectivity.<sup>2</sup> In the everyday performance of citizenship there are few occasions when people are hailed to express their commitments to strangers in the polity. The explicit avowal of civic identity in the ritual space is an exception to these silent, “deep rules,” executing an illocutionary force that materializes identities.<sup>3</sup> Blood donation is especially noteworthy given that “democratic citizenship requires

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rituals to manage the psychological tension that arises from being a nearly powerless sovereign,” generating trust and sacrificial reciprocity among anonymous citizens.<sup>4</sup>

One need only look to the events of September 11, 2001, to comprehend the enormous cultural capital of giving blood. By the end of the day, the Red Cross blood donation telephone line received more than a million calls from citizens eager to help with relief efforts, shattering the previous record of 3,000 calls in a given day. The next morning, at the request of President George Bush’s staff, a blood drive was held in the White House. Keeping to form, Congress initiated a two-day blood drive in offices of the House of Representatives and the Senate. In fact, in “the first month following the attacks alone, the Red Cross collected two million units of blood and more than a quarter of a million donors gave for the first time.”<sup>5</sup> Such events reinforce David Schneider’s observation that blood is the defining trope of the American character, emphasizing that a “blood relationship is a relationship of identity.”<sup>6</sup>

Among those people to show up at churches, schools, town halls, and other institutions of civic consequence in the aftermath of September 11 were uncounted numbers of queer men. One by one, as they rolled up their sleeves eager to demonstrate their support, they were turned away from sites where citizenship is performed daily. Each of these men was told individually that he was a member of a “high risk” group for contracting and spreading HIV. All of them carried this label regardless of the longevity and monogamy of their relationships, their safe sex practices, or their HIV status. Despite recurring appeals for inclusion in this life-saving system, queer men have been told repeatedly they are helping most when they refrain from donation.

Deferring queer blood has been a standard practice among blood collection agencies for two and a half decades. At the height of the AIDS scare in the 1980s, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), in conjunction with the Public Health Service, implemented donor exclusion policies that prohibited any man who had engaged in sexual activity with another man from donating blood.<sup>7</sup> At the time, little was known about AIDS or effective methods of prevention. A number of individuals were contracting HIV from blood transfusions and an unfolding national crisis demanded immediate action. When government agencies issued their public health recommendations there was little institutional support for spurring initiatives, scant proof that AIDS was caused by a virus, and no scientifically tested methods for recognizing HIV in the blood supply.

With advances in technology, HIV can now be detected in donated blood within days.<sup>8</sup> As such, the odds of contracting HIV through blood transfusion are miniscule. Unfortunately, the criteria for determining who should, and should not, contribute blood have not evolved with scientific advancements.<sup>9</sup> On May 27, 2007, the FDA’s Blood Products Advisory Committee (BPAC) reiterated its support for the indefinite deferral of blood donations from any man who has “had sex *even once* with another male since 1977.”<sup>10</sup> The agency has vehemently denied that this policy is a direct attack on the character and integrity of queer men, asserting that such moves are a matter of public health, not individual stigma.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, the rejection of queer blood illustrates a complex cultural management of bodies, a disciplining of

citizenship and its affiliation with performances of nationalism.<sup>12</sup> If a “sense of strangeness is necessary for reflection on the limits of one’s moral awareness,” then the sacrificial discourses of the blood ban illuminate the boundaries of acceptance for queer men in the social imaginary.<sup>13</sup>

When confronted at blood donation centers with inquiries about sexual history, there are two obvious ways for queer men to answer. The first is to admit openly that they have participated in acts which run contrary to the safety standards adopted by the FDA and be turned away. In the ritual space of public sacrifice they may confess their “sins” and either protest or withdraw quietly. The alternative is to deny their sexual history, roll up their sleeves, and allow their symbolically tainted blood to flow into the bodies of six strangers living, or perhaps dying, in the polity. Lying reduces embarrassment, avoids confrontation, and defies the institutionally mandated exclusion. On the other hand, if the men are caught, it could lead to disciplinary measures, depending on the motives of the contributor and the quality of his blood.

On its face, it would appear that queer men lie to donate blood, or alternatively refuse to hide their identities, because they wish to be included as “citizen equals” in the larger polity. While such a reading could be potentially advantageous in a culture where the term “equality” carries considerable cultural capital, these understandings address only one aspect of a complicated rhetorical situation.<sup>14</sup> Equally significant is the fact that queer men choose to pass, or refuse to lie, in order to defy reductively ascribed notions of identity. They resist a state-sanctioned, pre-determined essentialism by refusing incorporation into neatly defined categories of classification. While so-called “identity politics” are often critiqued as a brash form of activism that falls into the hazardous throws of essentialism, serious work remains to be done on those factions which are always already positing all queer men as essentially the same.<sup>15</sup>

This essay argues that “passing” and “protest” are correlates of one another, existing not as two separate tactics but as reciprocal forces that attempt to enact social change.<sup>16</sup> Although passing may not always appear resistive, its importance as a mechanism of pride, power, and moral agency should not be ignored. As James Scott has noted:

So long as we confine our conception of *the political* to activity that is openly declared we are driven to conclude that subordinate groups essentially lack a political life or that what political life they do have is restricted to those exceptional moments of popular explosion.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, comprehending the necessities of *infrapolitics* is central to understanding the social resistance of oppressed groups. Robin Kelley has argued that infrapolitics and verbal resistance “are not two distinct realms of opposition to be studied separately and then compared; they are two sides of the same coin that make up the history” of activity among marginalized people.<sup>18</sup> Probing the connections between men who lie to donate blood and those who refuse to deny their sexuality offers new insight into

the factors that motivate each group, the self-negotiations they make, and the discursive violence enacted on their bodies.

Conceptualizing those forms of daily life not always visible to power structures, what Scott refers to as “hidden transcripts,” is easily accomplished using contemporary understandings of passing. However, when addressing issues pertinent to the blood ban, it is difficult to ascertain the significance of passing without contemplating the verbal protests of queer bodies in the ritual space.<sup>19</sup> The men that protest demand recognition as members of a diverse collective not easily stereotyped and excluded. They are motivated by the systemic harm inflicted on them and, as a result, resist culturally ascribed generalizations. They do the important work of reminding blood collection agencies that they are a constant presence in the polity—and that where one of them resides, there are assuredly more. The significance of these contestations is striking in that they not only articulate a refusal to pass, but also affirm the very *potential* to pass.

Just as protesting draws attention to practices of passing, passing supports discourses of dissent. Passing affords the men, in the words of Charles Morris, an “obscured agency, and immersion in the mainstream, precisely so that one might swim against the tide, undermining the homophobic order of things.”<sup>20</sup> The men who openly dissent draw attention to those who pass and, in doing so, force questions about the number of queer donors and the amount of “tainted” blood slipping into the system. If one takes seriously the claims made by the FDA that blood donations from queer men would lead to heightened infections in the blood supply, then logically gay men who give would spark countless problems; if men who have sex with other men continue to contribute blood, there should be evidence of increased infections. Such has not been the case.<sup>21</sup>

This essay critically analyzes the responses of twenty-one men I interviewed to explore how “passing” and “protesting” function in this ritualized space. Their experiences are an important, but often overlooked, aspect of this discursive and political battle. Importantly, none of the men who have given blood have received notification that their blood has been discarded, was tainted, or has gone unused. In short, their blood is as pure as the fluids of any heterosexual donor. This infiltration renegotiates everyday sociality with the knowledge that “intimate relations and the sexual body can in fact be understood as projects for transformation among strangers.”<sup>22</sup> The men in this study initiate discourses that are subtle and often unseen, but are also slowly gaining attention among blood collection agencies, college students, and citizens eager to invoke change.

### **Passing and Protesting**

“Passing” is generally regarded as the ability of a member of a disenfranchised group to render “invisible” those traits used to oppress them culturally and institutionally. Having eluded aspects of gender, race, class, or sexual orientation, people can paradoxically live their lives more openly when occupying a privileged space of secrecy. In Anna Spradlin’s account, “‘Passing’ is how one conceals *normal*

information about oneself to preserve, sustain, and encourage others' predisposed assumptions about one's identity."<sup>23</sup> Such actions have the potential to subvert traditional notions of identity and belonging, and create new forms of identification, opportunity, and difference. Passing can "represent viable means of survival and self-transformation under conditions that temporarily limit . . . moral agency."<sup>24</sup> These practices fashion a public subject who is momentarily empowered by a rearticulation of identity generally assumed to be transparent. Passing blurs insider/outsider relationships by rendering indistinguishable those normally positioned as "we" and those typically demarcated as "they."

Passing is especially significant to theories of identity as it approximates the degree to which performance is an intricate element of the self. Elaine Ginsberg notes that passing is inherently performative as it is "neither constituted by nor indicating the existence of a 'true self' or core identity," while simultaneously being "bound by social and legal constraints related to the physical body."<sup>25</sup> The "passer" takes advantage of cultural codes of performance to redefine abstract notions of the self in concrete and material ways. Passing is dependent on an audience that can be "duped," a set of circumstances that facilitates the means of specific performances, and an agent capable of executing the pass effectively.<sup>26</sup> Its discursive specularity (or lack thereof) sparks opportunities and anxieties, replete with rewards and penalties.<sup>27</sup>

As a historical phenomenon, passing has been employed to scrutinize the machinery of performance in quotidian life. In a world where queer visibility continues to balloon, it may seem counter-intuitive to suggest that passing remains a necessary tactic for survival. However, passing maintains its relevance in many facets of queer life, especially those emanating from cultural institutions that stress solidarity, sacrifice, and ritual.<sup>28</sup> Passing facilitates the creation of purified identities in ritual settings where notions of kinship and stranger relationality are not always equivalent. The U.S. military, for example, actively encourages soldiers to pass. Queer personnel must render their bodies "pure" through silence about their sexual orientation. While the shadow of AIDS affects this debate, the more common justification for the "don't ask, don't tell" policy centers on troop morale and unit cohesion. The visible incorporation of queers in hierarchical arenas imbued by rituals violates the heteronormativity keeping their sacrificially docile bodies "pure." Similarly, in many faiths those who perform rituals dependent on discourses of sacrifice and purity must be both male and avowedly not queer. Blood donation has long depended on discourses of purity to substantiate claims to safety, which is why volunteer blood is always more desirable than purchased fluids. The ritual site constitutes these common understandings of sanctity and pollution.

While passing is not as openly defiant as traditional forms of protesting, and certainly digresses from the standard mantra of "coming out" as a dutiful aspect of politically motivated principles, it can be an empowering experience—one which allows marginalized groups to avoid the "obsessive classification" of institutional bureaucracies such as science.<sup>29</sup> Catherine Squires and Daniel Brouwer point out that passing "is a transgression that inspires fear in the state and dominant social groups" because marginalized groups are usually contained through codified knowledge and

systems of control.<sup>30</sup> Despite such advantages, there is an ambivalence to these critiques. They maintain that while passing has the potential to cross boundaries, it also has the power to reinforce traditional categories between identity groups. Such conclusions surface frequently because passing is usually studied only after a person's normally assumed identity has been historically revealed.<sup>31</sup> However, passing also facilitates particular performances of stranger relationality.

Although passing is generally understood as challenging social norms, it is seldom understood as a viable form of performance that reinforces and dialogically fortifies existing conceptions of stranger relationality to strengthen community. Passing does more than draw attention to the inauthentic nature of identities. In the rhetoric of the blood ban, passing illustrates how all performances are unstable, all identities are inherently constitutive. This realization is not an impediment to communal bonds. Recognizing that citizenship is a signifier forever in process is the driving force of stranger relationality. Passing, like protest, seeks inclusion in the power structure, but questions the arrangement of the network it is challenging with the hope that "the poesis of scene making will be transformative, not replicative merely."<sup>32</sup> The men who lie about their sexual identity and those who express their orientation in this study, for example, are motivated by a shared need to exist in a diverse polity. They are moved by an audience that has instilled in them the value of community, the need to resist oppressive discourses, and the necessity to take their stories of transgression back to the communities where they reside.<sup>33</sup>

Those who cover up their sexual experiences in order to give blood are able to demonstrate firsthand that they are not vessels of disease longing to thwart the body politic. They occupy the ritual space of blood donation in a manner that allows them to resist universal notions of queer sexuality by attaining scientifically mandated clearance that they are in fact "healthy." They give their blood, it is tested, and when they are not contacted about negative results, their gift proves the contentions of the protestors. Passing reclaims and then reconceptualizes institutionally developed understandings of queer bodies, helping to disarticulate those identities from conceptions of disease. The men prescribe a personal antidote to the vexing plague of medicinal generalization and in doing so reconstruct their roles as citizens.

By protesting at the site where they are denied access to a ritual of citizenship, queer men also have the opportunity to alter the system by expressing the dangers of stigmatization on a local level. While such overt resistance inevitably prohibits them from participating in the act of blood donation, these men recuperate their citizenship by invoking dissent as a form of civic engagement. In short, they reject the implication that they are impure. Rather than reiterate rituals which reinscribe heteronormative identities, they rupture traditional notions of citizenship by disrupting the reconstitution of imagined purity.<sup>34</sup> With little more than their personal experiences to assert their arguments of purity and desired civic inclusion, they introduce the important claim that they should not qualify for deferral.

Protesting generates opportunities for publicly ruminating about the numbers of queer men donating blood. While organizations such as the Red Cross carefully avoid public controversies about discrimination, the agency is bending under the weight of

protests. On rare occasions it acknowledges that people of all sexual orientations have either withdrawn from donation or ignore the rules completely. At a 2006 meeting about deferral policies, a Red Cross spokesperson told the FDA that universities and colleges are increasingly protesting blood drives and that “many individuals with deferrable risks continue to donate.”<sup>35</sup> The presence of protestors incites concerns about the number of people passing. Shortly following this presentation, a student organization called “Fight to Give Life” enlisted more than twenty schools to protest in blood drives nationwide. A gay man leading the effort noted, “I lied when I first gave blood, at 17, because I was afraid to say ‘yes.’”<sup>36</sup> Collectively, they are creating change: the Red Cross now opposes the FDA’s stance on indefinite deferrals. While strangers lurking in the “hidden transcript” are not visible, their practices reverberate in the public sphere where policy is being negotiated.

In both passing and protesting, gay men constitute themselves as citizen actors. In defying the mandate of the FDA (quietly or loudly), these men return to their communities and develop stories of resistance with family members, friends, co-workers, blood donors, and others who share in their on-going struggles. They are ordinary people becoming narrators of their own lives, defining “the (common) place of discourse and the (anonymous) space of its development.”<sup>37</sup> These networks of resistance are rarely publicized, but have an important influence on the integrity of the men and the agency they achieve in partially constructing their roles in the polity. This discursive circulation allows them to “fashion their own subjectivities around the requirements of public circulation and stranger sociability.”<sup>38</sup> Although the deferral policies often compromise the manner in which queer men understand their bodies and civic identities, their actions remain a rich source of civil disobedience.

I turn now to the interviews conducted with twenty-one men who have, on some level, participated in the ritual act of blood donation.<sup>39</sup> I share their stories to illustrate the assorted ways in which queer men perform their citizenship in a ritualized space, even as institutional mandates strive to control the process and outcome of that performance. Their experiences represent the ways in which passing and protesting can act as weapons of the weak. These donors give presence to the fact that queer men are ever-present in the body politic and that their contributions and motives are far more diverse than imagined by advocates of the blood ban.

### **Civic Identity and Giving the Gift of Life**

Whenever a group of people discuss their experiences, there are few places where the word “always” is useful. While several men expressed a civic obligation to donate blood, others were deeply conflicted about having to “pass” and consciously self-excluded at the donation site. Despite demographic differences, the act of giving blood was always tied to personal norms of communal obligation. Like Danielle Allen, these men understood that sacrifice “makes collective democratic action possible.”<sup>40</sup> Many of them noted that donation was important because blood is an irreplaceable substance with no known substitute, but one that is exceptionally easy to harvest. Some asserted they gave blood because people they knew were deferred as



a result of health conditions. Still others said the Red Cross was missing out because they were the highly valued “universal donor.”

The impulse to give blood to reaffirm communal identities was strongly illustrated by the first man I interviewed, Adam, who has given blood in a number of locations in the United States and England. As a citizen he saw it as his duty to donate blood in the communities where he resided. He reflected, “If you can do something as little as a pint of blood, why not do it? I think that as a citizen, you’re someone who participates in a community, good or bad, you’re there.” Simon, who refuses to donate blood on the grounds that he has to lie about his sexuality, furthered these thoughts. “I think of myself as a citizen,” he said, “as someone who plays an integral part of society, meaning the everyday kind of operation of being a part of the community and then having a voice in our local, state, and national policy making machinery.” He added:

When I was younger everyone was told you should be giving blood and then you get into high school and you have all these blood drives and you’re made to feel bad if you don’t because it’s like you’re participating in something that’s essential. And, you know the same thing happens when we have a local or national crisis . . . whether it’s a Mother Nature kind of thing or whether it’s [a] terrorist attack.

The desire to participate in the civic ritual of blood donation often stemmed directly from personal experience. Many of the men had personal motivations for donating, and these reasons often took precedence in their minds over national identification. Family members who had suffered illness or injury, for instance, regularly surfaced in the interviews. As Simon explained, “I think for almost everybody, including me, at some point it hits home that someone in your family needs blood.” The coupling of necessity and family often gave way to conversations about familial rituals. Bartholomew, who used to volunteer countless hours for the Red Cross, commented that his mother could not donate blood, so his father often did. “I think that the fact that my father donated a lot of blood made me feel like I should continue with it.” Thaddeus’ memories of blood donation are directly tied to an annual family event. “There’s one crystalline experience in my memory growing up where my parents’ church always had a blood drive the day after Thanksgiving. And it was just this thing where everyone went together.” Caleb felt even more strongly about these health issues because he benefited from a blood donation as an infant. “I know that when I was born I needed a blood transfusion. And if I ever decide to have children or anybody in my family needed blood, I should be able to give it to them.” Although not going so far as to call it a right, the attention to family indicated a particular ethic of care stemming from norms of communal obligation and personal ability.

The association between blood and kinship is self-evident in the previous paragraph. What is striking is the idea that donation is something that is nearly impossible to imagine outside the bonds of community. It requires a reflection on the permeability of human life and the dependence people have on one another. The men recognized that “an environment of strangerhood is the necessary premise of some of

our most prized ways of being.”<sup>41</sup> Time and again, the men reaffirmed ethical impulses constructed from the most basic units of the social order—their partners, parents, friends, and local communities. As Jacob noted:

For me it really is a part of responsible citizenship and . . . there’s this need clearly out there that you hear about all the time . . . . People need blood and it’s not something I can do, and no one can really tell me why I can’t do it in a way that makes sense to me or in a way that feels fair.

The injustice here is not directed simply at the donor, but also at the anonymous recipients in the polis who benefit from a surplus of liquid life.

Catherine Bell reminds readers that it is in the ritual act that people constitute themselves as citizens.<sup>42</sup> Exclusion from performing these identities prompted a number of men to comment on the ways in which they understood their citizenship to be systematically corroded. There were more remarks on the role the ban played in positioning the men as “second-class citizens” than any single theme reported. Andrew, for example, bitterly noted:

I have had people ask me, they have the little sticker that says something like, ‘Be nice to me, I gave blood today,’ and they ask, ‘Oh, did you give blood today?’ and I’m like, ‘No, they won’t take my blood,’ and it makes me feel like it’s the 1960s when they didn’t want to take black blood and mix it.

Philip furthered this segregation metaphor, noting:

It separates a certain section of society and it puts them in a corner saying, ‘You’re not good enough,’ or ‘We don’t agree with your lifestyle.’ It just puts us in a little box. We fight every single day not to be put in that box.

Bartholomew explained:

It’s awkward when people ask me, ‘Are you donating blood?’ and I have to tell them, ‘No.’ And I feel at times, especially after the attacks on the World Trade Center—I felt like I was being anti-American for not donating.

These men embraced the communal obligation of blood donation as more pressing than suspicious generalizations. Being excluded encouraged feelings of isolation and alienation. The cultural capital of this ritual, coupled with emotional exclusion, often led many of the men to lie in order to donate. Passing afforded the opportunity to disprove false claims advanced by the institutions mandating the ban.

### **Those Who Pass**

One of the biggest fears expressed by the FDA when it first implemented the blood deferral policies was that hordes of gay men would donate out of spite, disdain, and vengeance.<sup>43</sup> Although several of the interviewed men continued to donate blood despite their contempt for an agency that condemns them, all professed altruistic motives for their sustained donations. Passing was regarded as a necessary evil for aiding other citizens. It was also a means of protection in locations where they could be “outed.”

The blood ban has had varying effects on the way queer men understand their place in the citizenry. Despite the strain these policies can have on the men who pass, each one who lies in order to donate blood serves an important function when one contemplates resisting the ban. The men create alternative narratives about their health and the productive impact they can have on their communities. In giving voice to these experiences, the donors forge new possibilities for challenging the ban, articulating “hidden transcripts” among those deferred. When the men in this study detail their experience it aids in disproving the disparaging policies sanctioned by the government.

By passing and then verbalizing their stories, the scandalous donors are able to give first-hand accounts of why the policies are out of date. All of the men interviewed have shared their stories with other people—family, friends, and co-workers. In doing so, they create communities where struggles are mediated beyond the reach of those in power. They create new forms of identification and gradually build discursive means of resistance. A quick survey of their responses illustrates this well enough. Adam, for example, insisted that numerous queer men he knows lie to give blood. He explained, “They feel that it doesn’t matter, that they’re not participating in high risk behavior, so it’s not an issue.” Isaac said that when blood drives come through town he often shares stories of donating with other people, particularly gay men. Philip has spoken to several family members and friends about the deferral policies. He explained, “I think everybody that I’ve talked to about it thinks it’s extremely unfair, discriminatory, that certain members of society are singled out . . . just because of their sexual practices.” Likewise, Peter said that he talks about the guidelines with other people every time a blood drive is held at his workplace. Paul has led chat room discussions on the internet with gay men about the blood ban, and many were unaware that it was in effect. More often than not, men who pass tend to complain to family and friends about the discriminatory rules. Regardless of the limitations on their conversations, it is important to note how these men dispute over-generalized harms associated with queer blood by placing their bodies in the ritual space to disarticulate notions of disease, enabling new understandings of citizenship and communal responsibility. Despite the lack of media attention given to this issue, demonstrations against the policies have emerged on college campuses through everyday networks, not large-scale organizing.<sup>44</sup> Scott reminds us that the “hidden transcript is not just behind-the-scenes griping and grumbling; it is enacted in a host of down-to-earth, low-profile stratagems designed to minimize appropriation.”<sup>45</sup> The prohibited donors reposition their stigmatized identities and take small initiatives on behalf of fellow citizens in the polity.

From a critical standpoint, the interviews also offered the opportunity to examine an array of important issues regarding the body and cultural politics. One of the more compelling phenomena that emerged during these discussions was the common theme of “being caught.” A number of the men felt they could be “outed” by blood collection volunteers. From their perspective, such forcible revelations about their identity could result in unknown punishments from the state. Adam recalled his first experience with the intrusive questionnaire: “I just said, ‘No,’ and I just prayed that

they couldn't tell." He believed that blood center officials could discern he was lying from his pulse and blood pressure. "I didn't know if they could even assume that you were gay and say, 'You can't donate.'" Peter had a similar experience. He reminisces:

I remember reading that and thinking, they're going to know. I got teased a lot about it growing up and somehow I just thought they would know, even if I answered, 'No.' I guess I was waiting for so long for someone to really call me out on it.

Paul said that the first time he heard the question he was completely caught off guard:

I was even sweating at one point I was so nervous. Every time the nurses came up, I kept thinking they were going to come up and say, "We saw the way you were looking and we want to talk to you a little more."

Five of the men who have stopped donating blood anxiously described the consequences they might confront if they were "caught." However, none of the men could cite the punishments they might face. Thomas, for example, said he did not want to deal with the legal repercussions that could accompany lying, but he had no idea what those might be. John also brought up the legal aspect of donation, and confused lying on the stand with the questions he responded to at the blood donation center. "What's the legal term when you lie? Perjury? I figure that the Red Cross and the National Bone Marrow center could possibly, I don't know, bring up perjury charges or something." Paul wondered if he could be taken to jail for denying his sexuality. He pondered, "If they found out I was sleeping with men, have I committed some sort of perjury? Or they'd put me on some list somewhere."

This vague image of legal repercussions is striking insofar as the men did not need to know the punishments prior to disciplining themselves.<sup>46</sup> Although gay men will be turned away for admitting they have had a same-sex experience, it is difficult to prosecute a person for lying about his sexuality unless he knowingly contributes to the spread of a disease. Further complicating this ambiguity, some organizations such as the American Association of Blood Banks (AABB) have established so-called "hearsay" rules. So, if a gay man donated blood, a third party could report his actions because of his "high risk" status. The AABB would then call the donor and ask if he was a member of that high-risk group. Regardless of the answer, the blood is usually discarded.

Often the donor questionnaire furthered anxieties for men who were not yet at ease with their sexual orientation. Several of the men were in the closet when they first attempted to donate blood. Because many of them were not "out," were married, and had limited access to information about sexual orientation, they were often caught off guard by the donor screening question. For a number of the donors, living "out and proud" is simply not an option. Among the men I interviewed, at least two specifically mentioned being members of the armed forces. Their stories are especially intriguing because of the conflicting policies at play when the military sponsors a blood ban. Since the early years of the Clinton administration, the "don't ask, don't tell" policy has supposedly guaranteed job security to those who identify as gay or lesbian.<sup>47</sup> Under such measures, the military is not to inquire about a person's sexual

orientation. When the Red Cross appears on base to collect blood, however, such questioning does transpire.

Not all men are willing to make such sacrifices. Several of those interviewed felt the need to protest overtly the actions of the FDA and blood collection agencies. Much like those who pass, they have a felt obligation to retain a sense of dignity, but do so by refusing to lie. They believe there is integrity and pride in embracing those elements of their identity used to position them at the margins of the polity.

### **Those Who Protest**

The most endearing and amusing stories came from men who were confrontational with the people turning them away. When asked, “Are you a man who has had sex with another man?” seven of the respondents refused to conceal their sexual orientation. These men insisted they were safe in their sexual practices, had been tested for HIV, and had every right to be treated as their heterosexual counterparts. These men declined to “pass” in the name of “the public.” Rather, they forced conversations about sex, blood, and altruism. They felt that the diversity of the queer community was oversimplified, their contributions as civic participants were disparaged, and their relationships maliciously denigrated.

Most of the men who refused to lie did so to resist the sanctioning of insidious stereotypes. This dissent occurred in many forms. Some repeatedly fought institutional generalizations. Simon, for example, attempts to give blood on a regular basis, even though he recognizes he will be turned away. He reported, “Even after I knew I wasn’t supposed to, I did it just to make a point.” Simon, who works on a university campus, says he reports the Red Cross to the GLB incidents team each time they collect blood.

It got really irritating for me, particularly because it was as if something that I was doing was dirty and nasty and yet some of the students that I work with all the time that I know really well, you know had had five or six sexual partners in the past two weeks. And I’ve had the same sexual partner now for eight years. Why that’s seen as negative, I don’t know.

Simon regarded it as his duty to report the Red Cross to the harassment team because of the potential effect it could have on students. “The first time I just left. I felt totally rejected. After that I became vigilant, I just went, completed it all, then the person told me that I couldn’t [donate] and I complained to them about it.” He was especially troubled by the fact that the Red Cross was encouraging students who were banned from giving blood to help out in other ways, such as working the table where cookies are served to other donors.

Protests often transpire during moments of crisis, when the reiteration of a definition, characteristic, or identity is called into question. While crises often galvanize political unity and sacrifice, the necessity of defining who one is at times of moral uncertainty can have a powerful role in the constitution of self. Many of the men said they showed up to donate blood at an important juncture in their lives—immediately after “coming out.” In contrast to the men who lied because they

were not yet “out,” these donors, having recently struggled with their sexuality, could not in good conscience conceal their identities. Jacob, for example, rebuked the policy at a time in his life when he was frustrated with a world that forced him to deny his sexual orientation. So, he defiantly told the blood center workers that he was gay and disappointed in their measures. When he first attempted to donate years ago, before sexuality was so openly discussed, he said it embarrassed the volunteer. He describes her as having a “bright red face.” He remembers, “I mean every time. Regardless of whether going through the screening or debating or talking about the issues, ‘Where do you now stand on this,’ it’s always the same—bright red face.” Similarly, the issue of pride motivated James to confront a worker.

I went up and said, “What’s up with this?” You know of course I was young and a college student. I was probably pretty irritated by it. Obviously they weren’t going to give me the answer I wanted to hear.

Despite the lack of immediate change to the policy from these individual contestations, the collective weight of these encounters is paying off. The Red Cross’s break with the FDA is evidence that the benevolent organization fears losing young donors forever because of negative associations established early in life.

Denial was considered deleterious by many of the men, as it conjured up images of the past when they were trapped in the closet. Jacob indicated the ban made him feel like a second-class citizen in much the same way being in the closet can feel personally oppressive. He was uncomfortable with the “whole concept of denying who you are. . . . I want to be afforded the opportunity to do that without being harassed on the way.” Mark concurred with this notion, saying he thought these policies infringed on his quality of life because of the misconceptions it circulated. He explained that when he thinks of the blood ban, “the first thing that comes to my mind is that it feeds into other misconceptions and instills fear.” Protesting illustrated a desire to break free of institutional approval, even though it simultaneously sought affirmation in its structures.

By withdrawing from the process, these men dissociate themselves from images of a passively marginalized group and offer new forms of civic identification. They invoke dissent as a means to the end of enriching their roles as citizen actors. They question the fear of difference, pointing out that generalized claims always fall short of the diversity of men who have sex with other men. Rather than assimilate, they remain abject, constituting otherness, but always reminding those at the blood centers of the failures inherent in their claims. Understandably, some will argue that these men simply give the system what it desires: a segregation of queer blood. But one should not underestimate the narratives this protest could provoke, the people it could influence, or the attention to passing it affords.

### **The Recalcitrance of Resistance**

Queer men recognize that these policies are based on grossly distorted scientific data used to malign them. However, simply because the policies are resisted and

self-evidently biased does not mean they have no impact on queer men or on the ways in which they understand their bodies and conceptualize their civic identities. Indeed, the deferral policies created a number of problems that prevent any romanticizing of these resistive practices. One of the more distressing findings of this study, for example, was the degree to which queer men expressed doubt about the health and permeability of their own bodies. In many ways, they became strangers to themselves.

Most of the people who had stopped donating said they did so because there was always a fear in the back of their minds that somehow, somewhere, things had gone wrong. A condom had broken during sex. A new virus strand would be discovered. They had placed too much faith in science. They hadn't put enough trust in their doctors. Continually, they positioned themselves as potential threats to the very strangers they were hoping to aid. Despite the felt need to pass or protest, the ban altered the way many of the men viewed their bodies. Bartholomew, for example, was concerned that scientists might discover a new strand of HIV and it would eventually be traced to him. "Morally I thought, OK, maybe they don't know enough about this, who am I . . . and I just thought maybe I don't really know enough about this to go against top notch researchers." Although confident in the safety of his own sexual practices, the disciplinary arm of the state penetrated his mind. He never considered that many researchers oppose the deferral policy.

The articulation between HIV/AIDS and queer identity constantly surfaced over the course of these discussions. The men consistently called into question the claims made by the FDA that gay people are not implicated in these policies. Although significant strides have been made in HIV education, a number of people continue to view AIDS and being queer as synonymous, and this includes a number of gay men who live in fear of their own sexuality because of these debilitating connections. This is not to say that queer men cannot be infected or that danger to the gay community does not exist. However, these blanket declarations mask the productive role queers could play in society and the dangers presented by rhetorically purifying health risks to heterosexual communities.

Thomas stumbled over his words as he expressed why he had stopped lying in order to donate blood. "Fear of—if I were to be an HIV carrier that someone else would contract it and then I personally would know they contracted it." Philip shared these concerns, saying:

I think in the beginning it was the fear of, "Oh, gosh what if I did give blood and it came back positive," and so forth and so on, and just that fear of you know they'd find out or something.

He continued, "I had always practiced safe sex and so I've never worried about that, but there's always that doubt. There's always that thinking, 'Oh gosh,' maybe there was that one time I slipped up." Paul insisted that he never felt as though he was a member of a high-risk group sexually, but the Red Cross policies called that certainty into question.

Every time I gave . . . I had that fear still that I might get a card that would say, “You need to call us.” There was still that initial gut fear that when I gave, I would get a letter that said, “You’re positive,” or whatever, and, “Why are you giving?” and I’d go to jail or something.

While he donated frequently when he was experimenting with oral sex, he explained that he only gave once after having anal intercourse. Despite being tested for HIV, he still felt a substantial degree of guilt for days after giving.

At that point I knew I was at much higher risk, even though I was using condoms, I still felt I was at a much higher risk than I had been . . . . The fear was that by doing this I could really hurt somebody.

Although Luke had planned to withhold donations for political reasons, he also began to question the degree to which his sexual activities, all of which he described as safe, could overpower the blood supply.

Resistance here may appear to be compromised, but one should not undermine the important function of self-doubt in creating a mode of self-empowerment. Shame often constitutes the very identities people embody.<sup>48</sup> It is, as Shampa Lahiri reminds us, the active policing of the boundaries of identity that “thrust private acts of transgression into the public domain and in the process laid bare the hidden spaces of identity formation.”<sup>49</sup> The system may have an effect on queer bodies, but that does not wholly negate resistance to the system initiated by the men. Nonetheless, it is not surprising that a large percentage of the donors had grown discouragingly ambivalent about the policy. Their pride is chipped away, often encouraging them to focus not on the well-being of the polity and the advantages of donating healthy blood, but on their bodies—whether diseased or not. Thaddeus remarked that he had grown up in New York, where there were constant blood shortages. He had a difficult time comprehending why so many healthy donors are omitted.

I don’t think of it in terms of like a right to donate blood, like, “You need my blood more than I need to give it.” So like, you can have my healthy blood. My type of blood is AB negative, it’s useful. Fine don’t take my “gay blood.” It’s one of those stupid things.

The attitude that they would defer themselves to avoid problems was shared among interviewees. Matthew lamented, “I guess after the first time . . . I was like, if you don’t want my blood, fine, I’m not even going to try. So, you’re missing out.” Remarks such as this are reminiscent of Julia Kristeva’s observation: “[I]ndifference is the foreigner’s shield. Insensitive, aloof, he seems, deep down, beyond the reach of attacks and rejections that he nevertheless experiences with the vulnerability of a medusa.”<sup>50</sup> Repeat donors are typically people who have a heightened understanding of the needs of the community and their own bodies. Here, however, it is easy to witness the dilapidation of communal bonds as the corpus of the other is rejected.

An equally troubling effect is the degree to which some men felt the need to establish hierarchies of purity in opposition to other citizens. Women, for example, came up frequently when discussing groups that were allowed to donate. A number of remarks compared gay men who could not give to female donors who could. While



specific examples of populations that should not be able to give blood were never solicited, various respondents were quick to offer illustrations. Isaac, for example, was comparing a monogamous man to a sex worker in one instance: “[A] female can come in—a female prostitute who sleeps with you know 20, 30 guys a month can give blood with no problem.” Likewise, John and Andrew brought up the image of the “prostitute” and complained about the ease with which they could contribute blood.

To be clear, sex workers are not supposed to donate blood. However, these frequent remarks were striking not simply because of their misogynous tendencies, but also because of the obvious need to constitute a “lower being,” someone so absolutely impure by virtue of her sexual habits that she is in need of even more stringent regulation.<sup>51</sup> Regardless of intent, the men almost always returned to the image of the female body for comparisons to their own. While there were references to “heterosexuals” broadly, and these images remained largely without gendered explanation, more specific examples clearly identified women. Philip, for example, remarked, “I may be mistaken, but my understanding is they can ask a woman if she’s had 17 sexual partners in the last week, but she can still donate blood.” Philip is not completely off the mark with this speculation, as the Red Cross asks women only if they have had sex with a member of a “high risk” group recently.

Of course, there are not likely to be many women who have seventeen sexual partners in the duration of seven days. So why did several of the men employ this imagery? One answer might lie in the patriarchal structure of our culture. After all, they may be gay men, but they are still men. The image of the female body as more polluted, more excessive, and more dangerous is a longstanding trope of Western history.<sup>52</sup> Or, perhaps these comparisons were drawn because both heterosexual women and queer men have sex with men. To avoid totalizing, there were several positive references to women throughout the interviews. For instance, Luke thought that gay men could learn from the feminist movement, especially when arguing that small, quotidian details such as language choice are important. Affirming remarks were especially abundant in the large number of positive comments the respondents made about blood center staffs, overwhelmingly composed of women.

Indeed, the gender composition of blood center workers may be at the very heart of this stigmatization. A large number of the men who were confronted, turned away, or forced to lie were screened by women. Here one finds another hurtful outcome of a policy that is devised by people who are never in the position to turn donors away from giving blood. It is entirely possible that the structure of the Red Cross, with so many woman volunteers at donation sites, engenders a situation in which queer citizens connect their deferral experience with a female citizen. As such, the shunned donors are repeatedly creating arguments in their heads to prove their worth, refuting those people who essentialize, stereotype, and ultimately dismiss them. It is one more way in which the organizations that mandate the ban are able to draw attention away from their policies and onto the bodies of unsuspecting and essentially powerless strangers.

### **Stranger Relationality and the Reconstitution of “Bad Blood”**

Blood donation secures its value as an imperative cultural practice only to the extent that strangers repeatedly actualize the discursive bonds of public life. The urge to resist pain incurred by the puncturing of one's skin is superseded by the conscious reflection of personal sacrifice and the pragmatic necessities of blood donation. In violating the purity standards implemented by the government, the men in this study actively reiterate these civic ties, privileging the value of seeing like a citizen over the institutional tendencies of seeing like a state.<sup>53</sup> The many faces of stranger-relationality embodied by these men accentuate the advantages of infrapolitics in resisting state-authorized essentialism, the relationship those hidden transcripts share with public transgressions, and the narratives invigorated by these queer networks.

The statistical obsession of the sciences that undergirds the donation process does little more than situate queer men as impure citizens. To resist these generalizations, queer men both pass and protest to disarticulate projections of affliction and stigma from their bodies. The hesitation of some men to continue donating blood may suggest that resistance has been thwarted. However, those who refrain from donation need not recite resistance in the same fashion to combat the deferral measures. Their initial infiltration of the system remains successful and their enduring discussions illustrate a continued engagement with the issue. More often than not, reproach to the state is dispersed through everyday transgressions that alter the consciousness of the people participating in the polis. Collective action is possible only after such transformations have manifested in the minds of social actors. The gaps between and among diverse actions are necessary for change. Social movements are like muscles—if you work the same angle consistently, they tend to plateau. Movements, like muscles, need the negative, the downtime, and an assortment of practices to grow and achieve strength.

The reciprocal forces of passing and protesting continue to be viable tactics of resistance against the logics of the blood ban. Each is a powerful device, but the two are most potent when in conversation with one another. The resistive potential of passing and protesting is not isolated to the deferral policy. With regard to issues like “don't ask, don't tell,” for example, there are constant reminders in the public sphere that queers are serving in the military. Enlisted queers disrupt normative expectations of militarism, drawing attention to discourses of heterosexist exclusion. Passing and protesting are a corrective to this debilitating force, rousing possibilities for altering the consciousness of queer actors. When Americans are told the first U.S. soldier injured in Iraq is gay, for instance, it draws attention to the number of queers serving in uniform. Those passing may not actively encourage such tabulations, but their very service gives space for exploring their presence. Conversely, those who have left the military (by force or by choice) and who elect to speak against government policies support those passing by propagating arguments for queers who cannot speak.

Where the true effect of these protests can be productively felt is in the stories that queer citizens carry back to their communities. Their experiences have the potential to influence local, and even federal, policies. While I want to avoid rendering hidden

transcripts theoretically impotent by suggesting public discourses are needed to prove their effectiveness, there are emerging networks of resistance emanating from these practices. Dozens of protests against the blood ban are occurring on high school, college, and university campuses every year. Along with “Fight to Give Life,” there is now a student organization based at Harvard’s Law School dedicated explicitly to combating these policies. Protests have been sparked at Stanford, the University of New Hampshire, the University of Vermont, the University of Arkansas, Bowling Green State University, and Dickinson College, among others.<sup>54</sup> These networks continue to take root in other settings as well. A sixteen-year-old high school student protesting at Jonathan Law High School in Connecticut told the *Advocate* she was speaking out because one queer student was excluded from the ritual.<sup>55</sup>

These networks of resistance remain imperative for dismantling the deferral policy. Certainly, the blood supply needs additional donors, and queer men would provide countless amounts of liquid life. About 38,000 units of blood are required every day in the United States for transfusions alone, and much more is required when factoring in blood products. Lifting the ban would alleviate blood deficits to a small degree, but the shortages have not been influential enough to initiate change. Losing current or potential donors, however, does spark anxiety for collection agencies. Calls by the Red Cross to relax the ban have not arisen solely from a desire to avoid charges of discrimination, but from the prospect of losing queer-friendly heterosexual donors early in life: the blood donation process, being articulated in the minds of those young citizens with prejudice and inequality, propagates unfavorable attitudes difficult to repair. The commitment to strangers generated by protests is not merely heart-warming for queers—it is essential. At the same time, the people most hurt by a scarcity of blood are not the masterminds of these measures, but those occupying hospital beds. The possibilities for stranger-relationality are endless, but the system leaves few avenues for both resisting the guidelines and offering comfort to fellow citizens.

Although many people, including scores of queer men, express ambivalence towards the deferral policy, other donors continue to confront the questionnaire daily. In this light, the ban is ominous because of the false epistemological images of queer men it circulates. About 22,000 people donate blood every day. And every one of them, regardless of sex, race, class, religion, age, and political affiliation, are exposed to the phrase: “Are you a man who has had sex with another man one time since 1977?” This question reinforces a model of citizenship that capitalizes on distrust and disconnectedness, not generosity and altruism among strangers. Until these measures are altered, queer men will continue to pass and protest, quietly building networks of resistance, constituting themselves as citizens outside the reach of repressive institutional discourses.

## Notes

- [1] For an extended history of blood donation see Douglas Starr, *Blood: An Epic History of Medicine and Commerce* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1998).

- [2] Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 76.
- [3] Danielle S. Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 10.
- [4] Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 41.
- [5] American Red Cross, *September 11, 2001: Unprecedented Events, Unprecedented Response. A Review of the American Red Cross' Response in the Past Year* (2002), 16.
- [6] David Schneider, *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 25.
- [7] Ronald Bayer, "Blood and AIDS in America: Science, Politics, and the Making of an Iatrogenic Catastrophe," in *Blood Feuds: AIDS, Blood, and the Politics of Medical Disaster*, ed. Eric A. Feldman and Ronald Bayer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 25.
- [8] See U.S. Food and Drug Administration, *FDA Workshop on Behavior-Based Donor Deferrals in the NAT Era* (transcript, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD, March 8, 2006), 87.
- [9] Each year about twelve million units of blood are donated to America's supply—and approximately ten units of HIV-positive blood pass undetected, causing two to three cases of infection. Lifting the current ban could result, at most, in one to two additional cases of HIV a year. However, this is the *highest* number estimated and a strong possibility exists that no contaminated transmissions would result.
- [10] Although the committee reaffirmed its support in 2007, the year 2000 was the last time the issue of relaxing the ban was brought before the BPAC. Emphasis mine.
- [11] See the explanation on the Red Cross homepage at <http://www.redcross.org>.
- [12] The complex relationship between HIV, science, and nationalism has been explored in a number of texts, including: Thomas Yingling, *AIDS and the National Body* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Cindy Patton, *Inventing AIDS* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Paula Triechler, *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).
- [13] Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, "Public Identity and Collective Memory in U.S. Iconic Photography: The Image of 'Accidental Napalm,'" *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20 (2003): 60.
- [14] Celeste Michelle Condit and John Louis Lucaites, *Crafting Equality: America's Anglo-African Word* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- [15] For discussions of identity politics see Walter Benn Michaels, *The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 1–20; Amanda Anderson, *The Way We Argue Now: A Study in the Cultures of Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 21–66; Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America is Wracked by Culture Wars* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1995); R. Anthony Slagle, "In Defense of Queer Nation: From Identity Politics to a Politics of Difference," *Western Journal of Communication* 59 (1995): 85–102.
- [16] There are probably men who admit to being gay and leave the blood center quietly because of shame, embarrassment, and anger.
- [17] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 199.
- [18] Robin Kelley, "'We Are Not What We Seem': Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South," *Journal of American History* 80 (1993): 111.
- [19] In concentrating on queer men, I do not intend to undermine the support and subversive actions of those who do not identify as such. Many heterosexuals, lesbians, and bisexual women do not support these policies.
- [20] Charles E. Morris III, "'The Responsibility of the Critic': F. O. Matthiessen's Homosexual Palimpsest," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 84 (1998): 263.
- [21] Dr. Michael Busch told a 2006 workshop sponsored by the FDA that blood centers only deal with one or two HIV positive donations a year and those usually come from heterosexuals.

Since the implementation of nucleic acid testing (NAT) in San Francisco, there have been “four really proven HIV transfusion transmissions missed by mini-pool NAT.” Busch said:

I just wanted to point out that none of these were MSM, or acknowledged MSM. Two of them were women with heterosexual infection and one was a male who, on follow-up extensive interview, denied MSM activity. So, what is getting through now is not related to MSM.

FDA, *Workshop on Donor Deferrals*, 202–3.

- [22] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 122.
- [23] Anna Spradlin, “The Price of ‘Passing’: A Lesbian Perspective on Authenticity in Organizations,” *Management Communication Quarterly* 11 (1998): 598.
- [24] Corinne Blackmer, “The Veils of the Law: Race and Sexuality in Nella Larsen’s *Passing*,” *College Literature* 22 (1995): 63.
- [25] Elaine K. Ginsberg, “Introduction: The Politics of Passing,” in *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, ed. Elaine K. Ginsberg (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 2.
- [26] Amy Robinson, “It Takes One to Know One: Passing and Communities of Common Interest,” *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1994): 721. See also Charles E. Morris III, “Pink Herring and the Fourth Persona: J. Edgar Hoover’s Sex Crime Panic,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88 (2002): 228–44.
- [27] Ginsberg, “Introduction: The Politics of Passing,” 2.
- [28] Among other places, passing remains a necessity in many sport cultures. It is also a necessity in many immigrant cultures and religions. Lest passing be dismissed as no longer vital to queer life, one need only revisit the 2004 elections, when eleven states passed amendments banning gay marriage. In those states where the votes against gays and lesbians were especially high, queers continue to live in a volatile world where being out and proud is not always an option.
- [29] Shompa Lahiri, “Performing Identity: Colonial Migrants, Passing, and Mimicry between the Wars,” *Cultural Geographies* 10 (2003): 411.
- [30] Catherine Squires and Daniel Brouwer, “In/Discernible Bodies: The Politics of Passing in Dominant and Marginal Media,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19 (2002): 287.
- [31] Helene Shugart, “Performing Ambiguity: The Passing of Ellen Degeneres,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 23 (2003): 30–54; John M. Sloop, “Disciplining the Transgendered: Brandon Teena, Public Representation, and Normativity,” *Western Journal of Communication* 64 (2000): 165–89; Squires and Brouwer, “In/Discernible,” 283–310.
- [32] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 122.
- [33] To avoid totalizing, I do not mean to imply that all men have similar motives when passing or protesting.
- [34] See, for example, Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1984; original work published 1966).
- [35] FDA, *Workshop on Donor Deferrals*, 329.
- [36] Andrew Keegan, “FDA Meeting Revisits Ban on Gay Blood Donors,” *Southern Voice*, March 10, 2006, <http://www.sovo.com/2006/3-10/news/national/fda.cfm> (accessed June 14, 2007).
- [37] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992; original work published 1984), 5.
- [38] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 121.
- [39] The interviews were undertaken according to a plan approved by the IRB at Indiana University (#03-7891). Volunteers were found by posting announcements on several e-mail listservs. All of the interviews were completed by me in person or by telephone, and each took approximately forty-five minutes to complete. The names of the respondents have been changed. While there was a core set of questions, the interviews were open-ended so that the respondents could best characterize their experiences of the donation policies and their

feelings towards agencies that mandate the ban. Unlike many university studies, the majority of these men were not students. As such, their ages, geographic locations, and attitudes towards blood, sexuality, and HIV varied. As the men offered their information, it became apparent that altruism, not civil disobedience, largely guided their practices. This guided me back to materials about passing and protesting. Especially in relation to passing, the men's responses alter the ways in which these tropes have traditionally been understood in the literature.

- [40] Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 29.
- [41] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 75.
- [42] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).
- [43] Institute of Medicine, *HIV and the Blood Supply: An Analysis of Crisis Decision Making*, ed. Lauren Leveton, Harold C. Sox, and Michael Stoto (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1995), 111, 122.
- [44] The blood ban is probably given little attention in either the popular or the queer presses because it is offered scant attention by major LGBT organizations. Being closely associated with AIDS and not an explicit "civil right," the issue of blood donation is often seen as culturally taboo.
- [45] Scott, *Domination*, 188.
- [46] This will come as little surprise to those familiar with Michele Foucault's work on discipline. However, one should not assume that simply because some men withheld from donation that their previous donations were less useful in challenging cultural assumptions about the safety of their blood. Neither does it suggest that all of the men in this study stopped donating. On discipline, see: Michele Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995; original work published 1979); John M. Sloop, *Disciplining Gender: Rhetorics of Sex Identity in Contemporary U.S. Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004); Nadine Ehlers, "Hidden in Plain Sight: Defying Juridical Racialization in 'Rhineland v. Rhineland,'" *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 1 (2004): 313–34.
- [47] On the "don't ask, don't tell" policy see: Gregory M. Herek, Jared B. Jobe, and Ralph M. Carey, eds., *Out in Force: Sexual Orientation and the Military* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Wilbur Scott and Sandra Carson Stanley, eds., *Gays and Lesbians in the Military: Issues, Concerns, and Contrasts* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1994).
- [48] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer Performativity: Henry James's 'The Art of the Novel,'" *GLQ* 1 (1993).
- [49] Lahiri, "Performing Identity," 412.
- [50] Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 7.
- [51] On the relationship between hierarchy, identification, and scapegoating, see Kenneth Burke's "The Rhetoric of Hitler's Battle" in Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 191–220.
- [52] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 147–54.
- [53] James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).
- [54] Joey Diguglielmo, "Blood Boiling Over Ban," *Washington Blade*, April 7, 2007, <http://www.washingtonblade.com/2007/4-27/view/actionalert/10498.cfm> (accessed July 8, 2007); "New Hampshire Students Protest Gay Blood Ban," *365gay.com*, April 22, 2005, <http://www.365gay.com/newscon05/04/042205blood.htm> (accessed June 14, 2007); Steven Bodzin, "Students Tap New Vein of Gay Issue," *Los Angeles Times*, July 10, 2005, <http://www.aegis.com/news/lt/2005/lt050704.html> (accessed June 14, 2007); Marie-Jo Mont-Reynaud, "Banned from the Blood Bank," *The Stanford Daily*, May 25, 2006, <http://daily.stanford.edu/article/2006/5/25/bannedfromthebloodbank> (accessed June 14, 2007).
- [55] "Students Protest Ban on Gay Blood," *Advocate.com*, October 19, 2006, [http://www.advocate.com/print\\_article\\_ektid37683.asp](http://www.advocate.com/print_article_ektid37683.asp) (accessed June 14, 2007).