

MAN MADE

BEST DOCUMENTARY WINNER: Atlanta Film Festival & Translations Film Festival



A FEATURE-LENGTH DOCUMENTARY TRACING THE VARIED LIVES OF FOUR TRANSGENDER MEN, AS THEY PREPARE TO STEP ON STAGE AT THE ONLY ALL-TRANS BODYBUILDING COMPETITION IN THE WORLD.

A Film by T Cooper

Executive Producers: Téa Leoni; John Hirsch and Ron Yassen



FILM SYNOPSIS

MAN MADE follows the extraordinary lives of four transgender men as they prepare to compete at TransFitCon, the only all trans-bodybuilding competition in the world—held in Atlanta, GA.

What precedes this triumphant moment are a set of personal and diverse journeys taken on the path to self-identity and empowerment. Told through the intimate and authentic lens of trans filmmaker T Cooper, MAN MADE intertwines the nuances of manhood, the drive for social justice, and the competitive desire to forge our own paths and be our personal best.

The strength on display in MAN MADE transcends the physical: Rese is a young father struggling with periods of homelessness; Dominic seeks out his family of origin, confronting an alternate history for himself; Kennie admits to himself and his loved ones who he is for the first time in his life; and Mason, a loving husband who struggles with mental illness, works daily to be the man he's always wanted to be—on both the inside and out. We follow these subjects' emotional and physical journeys as they navigate lives as the men they are, despite very real risks inherent in an often hostile social and political climate. For the men of MAN MADE, it's not about winning—it's about being seen.

MAN MADE takes us into the heart of transgender male (FTM) culture, revealing unexpected truths about gender, humanity and love.

MAN MADE is a character-driven, intimate, and riveting verité-style competition film, but also a unique social justice narrative. It speaks to the ways in which we all choose to define and reshape ourselves, both figuratively and literally.



T COOPER - DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

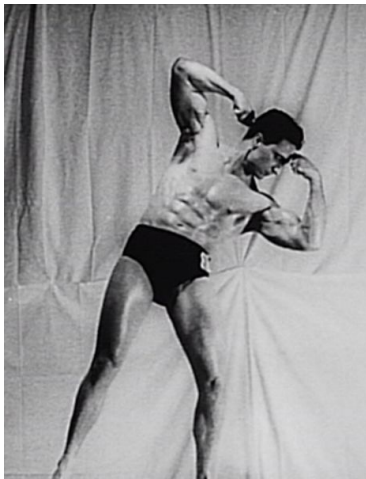


As a transgender man and best-selling author, journalist, television-writer, educator, and activist, I have been telling stories in both the mainstream and indie realms for more than 20 years. Now, in the feature-length documentary MAN MADE, I take an authentic, in-depth dive into the female-to-male (FTM) transgender experience via a new (actual) lens.

I was inspired to pick up a camera after hearing about Trans FitCon, shortly after moving to Atlanta four years ago. My initial impulse was to pitch a long-format written piece about the one-of-a-kind bodybuilding

competition, but as soon as I delved into the research and started meeting the athletes and learning about their inspiring lives, it became immediately apparent that their stories needed somehow to live and breathe on a screen—especially during this particular cultural and political moment.

Protections for transgender people (and so many others) are being attacked and rolled back at alarming rates. Violence against trans people (and all people of “difference”) is surging, while a vociferous segment of the population—not to mention an entire new administration—is challenging our very right to exist as humans (i.e. use a toilet, have access to safe health care, or possess legal ID). For these reasons, I believe that this project and ones like it are more vital than ever.



And while the transgender movement has certainly been having a bit of a cultural moment, many of the stories we see still follow a certain, familiar “transition narrative” (and far more often than not take up the trans-feminine experience). But because *MAN MADE* is unabashedly *trans-made*, it offers unique and relevant transgender stories that emerge from the inside out, as opposed to from the outside looking in.

Even though I am not a bodybuilder per se, I certainly know what it means to envision and then actually take steps to build the body—and life—that you want. So in some ways, this is *my* story. But it is also the story of anybody who has done what it takes to become the person s/he is meant to be. In this vein, bodybuilding has always fascinated me, ever since I first saw

Pumping Iron as a kid growing up only a few miles from the “Mecca” of the sport, Venice Beach, CA, where I’d hang on the fence and wonder at the (mostly) men flexing and preening for the crowds at Muscle Beach. The specimens of complete self-transformation thrilled me on a variety of levels—namely the way masculinity was performed in pursuit of the so-called “perfect” male physique. These days, to my thinking, we are *all* man-made, or self-made, regardless of the particulars of our bodies and lives: we all come into this world as one thing, and leave it as another. Pretty much all we do as humans is evolve, yes as a race, but also as individuals over our lifetimes.

And the individuals in this film certainly know from change and growth. While they all share a love of bodybuilding and desire to have their hard work rewarded at the competition, they nevertheless come from a wide variety of worlds and perspectives, utterly diverse in age, race, class, size/shape, geography, relationship status, housing security, familial support—and stage of transition. There is so much more to them than being trans—so much more to every human than a single moment or label could possibly encompass.

Like the subjects of this film, I know what's involved in making the life-altering decision to turn yourself into the person you know you are, despite the world telling you for your whole life prior that you are something else. I have to believe that if we keep insisting on telling our stories, it will be harder and harder to erase us.



T COOPER - DIRECTOR BIO

T Cooper is an acclaimed and best-selling novelist, television writer, journalist and filmmaker.

His first film, *The Beaufort Diaries*, is an animated short starring David Duchovny, which Cooper adapted from his own graphic novella of the same name. The film was an official selection at a variety of film festivals around the world, including Tribeca and SXSW.

Cooper's television writing credits include Netflix's *The Get Down* and BBC America's *Copper*. He is also currently co-writing (with his wife Allison Glock-Cooper) an original television series with A&E Studios for YouTube Red: *Changers* is adapted from their four-part Young Adult novel series, (*Changers Book One* was published in 2014; *Changers Book Two* was released in 2015; *Book Three* was published in 2016; and *Book Four* is forthcoming in September 2018.)

T Cooper is also the author of three other novels, including the best-selling graphic novel *The Beaufort Diaries* and historic novel *Lipshitz Six, or Two Angry Blondes*. His most recent nonfiction book is *Real Man Adventures* (McSweeney's), which explores 21st century masculinity from the personal to the universal.

Cooper's journalism and short fiction have appeared in a variety of publications, including *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *Mother Jones*, *Esquire*, *O: The Oprah Magazine*, *CNN*, *Out*, *The Advocate*, *The Guardian*, and *The Believer*, as well as on Public Radio, and in many other venues in both the U.S. and abroad.

Born and raised in Los Angeles, Cooper attended Middlebury College, and then taught high school in New Orleans before settling permanently in New York City in 1996, where he earned an MFA from Columbia University. He currently lives with his wife and their children in both Atlanta and New York City, and is currently a professor of creative writing at Emory University.

MAN MADE is his feature directorial debut.



TÉA LEONI - EXECUTIVE PRODUCER'S STATEMENT

I became involved very early as an EP on MAN MADE because I knew this project had every possibility of being not only a deeply moving, powerful film, but also an important one: a story that could make a palpable difference in the cultural conversation around transgender, and many other, social justice struggles.

The director, T Cooper, is a singular, multi-faceted writer and storyteller with decades of experience and successes in a wide variety of mediums. But beyond that background, as a transgender man himself, T was able to connect deeply and organically with the (also transgender male) subjects of MAN MADE in an authentic and immediate way. As a result, his film is striking, and simply feels like nothing I've seen in storytelling around transgender lives, either documentary or narrative.

I believe in the value of stories being told by the people whose stories they actually are. The manner in which these characters' lives unfold is natural, honest, and human, precisely because the access and intimacy T has achieved is unprecedented and almost familial, or even tribal. It is clear in every shot, every scene, that the filmmaker knows of what he observes. T presents his subjects, and by extension, his community, with dignity, humor, wisdom and respect. It is refreshing to examine gender, and specifically masculinity in this context, especially given that we are all much more familiar with the lives of trans women, as opposed to trans men.

The subjects in MAN MADE are at all stages of their life journeys and transitions. So are their families, partners, and communities. Their lives are three-dimensional and fresh, underscoring that being trans is not simply some peculiar subculture, but a vital part of our social fabric, filled with people who wrestle with social, personal, and professional dilemmas like everybody else. As a result, the stories feel universal, and that alone is a giant leap forward.

It is a testament to this film and the storytelling in it that in short order much of the "trans" of it all falls away, and you become swept up in the characters, simply because of their sheer humanity. In this way, MAN MADE is essentially an uplifting and inspiring film. Yes, the men face very real conflicts and challenges great and small (trans-related and otherwise), but in the end, we are left feeling hopeful and exhilarated, as each one steps on stage for a moment in the spotlight, where they are celebrated and finally seen for who they are.

Because of T's lens, MAN MADE can transform our discussion around not only gender and sexuality, but all forms of so-called "difference." Audiences will engage deeply with the many themes at play in this film, because MAN MADE resonates with anybody who has ever

struggled to become a better version of themselves, to connect with the wider world, and to find their truth. Simply put: you see this film, and it changes you.

PARTNERS

MAN MADE and *T Cooper* are supported by the *SUNDANCE* Documentary Film Program.



FILM SUBJECTS



Dominic, 26 (St. Paul, MN)

An aspiring singer/rapper, Dominic lives with his fiancée Thea, making ends meet as a dry-cleaning deliveryman and landscaper. “Dom” won 3rd place at last year’s Trans FitCon bodybuilding competition, stepping on stage bare-chested, pre-top-surgery. Dom will return to competition only a few months post-surgery, after a tough year that forces him to grow up in more ways than one.

Rese, 23 (Atlanta, GA)

Rese has a 5-year old son De'montae (to whom he gave birth). Rese shed 70-plus pounds before stepping on stage at the last Trans FitCon—his first time ever competing in bodybuilding. Post FitCon, Rese experiences a period of homelessness, shelters repeatedly turning him away because of his trans status. Active in Black Lives Matter, Rese is exploring a new relationship and living with his grandparents while preparing for next year's competition.



Mason, 40 (Cleveland, OH)

One of a handful of FTM bodybuilders who compete in mainstream competitions, Mason is training for Trans FitCon for the first time. He is married to love-of-his-life Anne, a veterinarian; the couple live next door to Anne's mother. (Mason is estranged from his own family, with the exception of a sister.) Mason struggles with bipolar disorder and was at times suicidal, until he transitioned and found adequate medical treatment—and the sport of bodybuilding, which Mason says saved his life.



Kennie, 34 (Conway, AR)

Kennie spontaneously decided to compete in last year's bodybuilding competition on the spot, realizing he wanted to officially begin his transition. Kennie is just starting to tell friends and family that he is trans. Kennie's mother and twin brother are struggling with the impending changes, as is his partner D.J., a lesbian who would prefer not to be with a man. Kennie works as assistant director of the fitness center at a small-town Arkansas University, while he trains to get back up on stage at Trans FitCon—this time after having started testosterone.



Tommy, 38 (Miami, FL)

Five years clean and sober, Tommy works as a full-time trainer in South Beach, and lives at home with his parents. As a teen, Tommy used to travel the world playing drums in his Pastor father's gospel band, and has only recently started to share his trans status with his community.

Watch the trailer: <https://vimeo.com/261025421>

PRESS

“Intimate... touching... an affecting portrait of four transgender men with a traditional sports movie climax.” —*The Hollywood Reporter*

“Compelling... A penetrating documentary which gets remarkable access to its subjects... an honest, universal look at body issues and the navigation of relationships.”
—*The San Francisco Chronicle*

“Fascinating.” —*The Advocate*

“A rare sort of film.” —*The Daily Beast*

“Compelling and emotional.” —*Film Inquiry*

“Passionate... Life-affirming.” —*San Jose Mercury News*

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