Professionally Queer: Queer Men and the World of Work

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS…………………………………………………………………ii

LIST OF TABLES……………………………………………………………………vii

ABSTRACT…………………………………………………………………………viii

CHAPTER

1. Introduction…………………………………………………………………………1
2. The Significance of Sexuality in the World of Work: For Whom and When Does Sexuality Matter?..40
3. Making Career-Related Decisions and Choosing Careers……………………………48
4. Navigating the Labor Market…………………………………………………….....69
5. Navigating the Workplace: The Role of Context-Specific Cultural Capital………………...109
6. Conclusion……………………………………………………………………...152

REFERENCES………………………………………………………………….....172
APPENDIX…………………………………………………………………………181

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: List of Respondents by Group……………………………………………………..184

Table 2: List of Respondents Grouped by Race………………………………………………185

ABSTRACT

In the past decade, scholars and the public have increasingly paid attention to queer populations and their experiences in the workforce. Yet, little work has been done to understand the meaning that queer[1] men attribute to their sexuality in shaping their career decisions and experiences, leaving unanswered how and under what conditions sexuality consequentially influences queer men's career decisions and experiences. Using data from 67 in-depth interviews with college-educated queer men living and working in the New York City Metropolitan Area, this dissertation examines how queer men make sense of their career-related decisions, attempts at securing employment, and their experiences once in the workforce as well as what role they believe their sexuality played in shaping these decisions and experiences. The central argument of this project is that the role that respondents believe their sexuality played in influencing career decisions and continues to play in shaping their experiences in the workforce is largely dependent on the perceived boundary brightness, or symbolic significance, surrounding or attributed to their sexuality; additionally, an individual's boundary brightness is subject to change across stages in one's career narrative. This boundary brightness was shaped by both how *meaningful and consequential* respondents believed their sexuality to be during a given career

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[1] I use the term queer to refer to any sexuality of my respondents to encompass all queer sexualities. I elaborate more on this in the methods section of Chapter 1.

stage and how *central* their sexuality was to their self-conception. I break respondents into 4 groups based on boundary brightness across the three stages in their career narratives (career-related decisions, the labor market, and the workforce). The first is the Consistently Bright group—for whom sexuality meaningfully influenced their career decisions, experiences on the labor market, and how they navigated the workforce. The second group, the Dimmed Boundaries group, believed that their sexuality shaped their career decisions but not as something that they had to manage on the labor market or in the workforce. The third group, the Brightened Boundaries group, did not see their sexuality as something that shaped their career-related decisions but as something that shaped their experiences either on the labor market or in the workforce. Lastly, those in the Never Bright group did not perceive their sexuality as meaningfully shaping their decisions or experiences at any stage of their career narratives. Further, these findings highlight both the centrality of masculinity in queer men's career narratives and the inadequacy of a categorical approach in examinations of sexuality and the sphere of work. I conclude by discussing what these findings can contribute to scholarly and public understandings of (sexual) identity and work and highlight potential avenues for future research.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Over the past decade, there has been vast legislative progress surrounding the inclusion of openly queer-identifying persons in the labor market and workforce more broadly. Many states have outlawed workplace discrimination on the basis of sexuality (HRC 2015), and many of the most prominent corporations in the United States have policies in place preventing discrimination toward their LGBTQ employees (Williams and Guiffre 2010). Yet, despite notable strides, extant research details that sexuality plays a vital role in a number of occupational outcomes, such as hiring decisions (Albeda et al. 2009; Tilcsik 2011; Mishel 2016), promotion decisions (Badgett et al. 2007), pay (Waite and Denier 2015), inclusion in advantageous social networks (Johnson 1995; Friskopp and Silverstein 1996; Ragins and Cornwell 2001), and workplace experiences (Cech and Rothwell 2020). Further, emergent research finds that there is also occupational segregation along the lines of sexuality (Tilcsik 2011; Tilcsik, Anteby and Knight 2015).

To date, much research has focused on demand-side explanations, such as discrimination or exclusion, to understand the ways in which sexuality remains a salient and consequential identity characteristic in the sphere of work. For example, most research in this realm of work focuses on the discrimination that queer-identifying individuals face in attempting to garner employment (Tilcsik 2011; Mishel 2016) or the disadvantageous experiences that queer workers face once in the workplace (Cech and Rothwell 2020). In the world of work, queer identities operate as a status characteristic, whereby queer individuals are viewed by others as less competent—forcing them to adopt strategies to navigate heteronormative and sometimes homophobic work environments (Johnson 1995; Ragins 2008; Cech and Rothwell 2020).

Yet, we currently know less about the supply-side explanations (such as choice) for labor market sorting. Past research has shown that supply-side mechanisms are crucial for understanding occupational segregation along the lines of race, class, and gender (Correll 2004; Cech 2013). Due to patterns of socialization and shared lived experiences, people of color, women, and individuals from less privileged backgrounds often select into different occupations than middle class white men—helping to reproduce occupational segregation and economic stratification. Given that these choices are seen as being self-expressive, they obscure larger patterns of stratification and the ways in which these decisions are constrained. Less is known about how this may operate for those with status characteristics that may not be readily apparent or visible, such as queer men.

Past work has documented that cultural beliefs about particular identity groups can work to constrain and shape the career-related decisions that individuals make (Correll 2004; Cech 2013). For example, Correll (2004) finds that individuals form career aspirations by drawing on perceptions of their own competence at particular tasks, which are shaped by their own socialization and broader cultural beliefs about their gender. I argue that exploring how less visible status characteristics shape self-conceptions and aspirations may call into question how central a role immediate categorization may be in the perpetuation of status inequalities. Past work has argued that categorization is a central and necessary step in generating and perpetuating status inequalities—one that shapes how we are socialized and treated as well as the status and opportunities we are afforded (Ridgeway 2011). Yet, queer sexuality is often not readily visible or discernable (Ragins 2008). Thus, for queer sexuality to shape or constrain career decisions might highlight the complexity of categorization and the nuanced impact it has in generating and perpetuating status inequalities.

I focus specifically on the career narratives of queer men in this project. Though persistent patterns of workforce inequality and devaluation have been documented for both queer men and women (Tilcsik 2011; Mishel 2016; Cech and Rothwell 2020), different explanations are offered with regard to the mechanisms underlying these inequities. Further, queer men and women have been found to concentrate in different occupations and have different earnings, largely due to cultural ideas about who can and cannot align with a given industry's ideal worker image (Baumle 2009; Baumle and Poston 2009). Given these differences in both patterns of workforce inequality and the cultural content of the stereotypes surrounding queer men and women, this project focuses on the experiences of queer men. Further, I argue that examining the career narratives of queer men may be especially fruitful for understanding the role often invisible status characteristics play in structuring work decisions and experiences, since they are simultaneously privileged on the basis of their gender and stigmatized on the basis of their sexuality. Possessing invisible status characteristics allows individuals with these identity characteristics to negotiate them in unique ways, including non-disclosure, in order to circumvent potential stigmatization (Ragins 2008). Given this, choosing and succeeding in occupations that are typically associated with masculinity and heteronormativity may be one mechanism by which queer men attempt to destigmatize their sexuality and gain recognition and worth from society (Lamont 2018). This mechanism of de-stigmatization may be especially salient given the contemporary reliance on neoliberal scripts, which prioritize economic success, competitiveness, and self-reliance (Lamont 2018).

Occupational and career-related decisions are often self-expressive and are shaped by cultural ideas surrounding our various identities. What might this mean for individuals with less visible identity characteristics? What may this mean for the ability of cultural ideas surrounding queer identities to constrain or shape aspirations and career-related decisions? Further, how do the career-related decisions that queer men make shape their subsequent experiences both on the labor market and in the workforce? Given this, I ask: How do queer men make sense of the world of work, in their career-related decisions and in the ways in which they experience both the labor market and the workplace?

I now turn to the literature on boundaries, which I argue offers useful tools for conceptualizing the complex, multifaceted ways in which social identities can shape career decisions and subsequent experiences on the labor market and in the sphere of work.

BACKGROUND

Boundaries

Recently, scholars have paid increasing attention to the ways in which group boundaries and boundary-making processes contribute to the reproduction or contestation of inequality between social groups (Armstrong 2002; Lamont and Molnar 2002; Lamont 2018). Boundaries and boundary-making are cultural processes that mold everyday interaction and result in unequal outcomes, shaping how we perceive different social groups (Lamont 2000). Boundaries, as meaning-making structures, impact the ways in which individuals make sense of the social world and help to entrench both material and symbolic inequality along categorical lines (Alexander 1992; Lamont and Molnar 2002; Young 2006; Wimmer and Lewis 2010).

As noted by Lamont and Molnar (2002), the study of boundaries allows us to capture the relational processes by which social groups construct, reify, and challenge perceived social differences and identity hierarchies. Boundaries can be both symbolic and social. Symbolic boundaries are understood as shared meaning structures and consist of the ways in which groups and members of collectivities distinguish themselves from one another; they also operate as tools through which we come to understand the social world (Lamont and Molnar 2002). Symbolic boundaries operate as the cultural content of group membership and foster feelings of similarity and difference between social groups (Epstein 1988; Ho et al. 2013). Groups and individuals can take up and use symbolic boundaries to gain esteem and respect (Lamont 2000) as well as to contest unequal social relations and negative stereotypes (Armstrong 2002; Lacy 2007). When widely agreed upon, symbolic boundaries become social boundaries or "objectified forms of social difference that work to delineate privilege from disadvantage" (Lamont and Molnar 2002). Social boundaries shape our social interactions and come in the form of residential segregation (Massey and Denton 1993), occupational segregation (England 1982; Maume 1999; Charles and Grusky 2005); and exclusion (Tomaskovic-Devey 1993; Reskin 2000).

Boundaries can also be internalized and work to constrain individual action. As illustrated by Jenkins (1996), a group's collective identity is produced through both internal and external classification, giving groups only so much agency in asserting their own identity. Once categories take hold and are given meaning, they both constrain and shape individual behavior (Ridgeway 1997). Gender scholars, for example, note that our gender performances and presentations are often (at least expected to be) deeply relational and constructed against hegemonic notions of what members of the diametric gender category should look and act like. Violations and deviations from social and cultural scripts are often punished and subject to scrutiny from both in and out-group members (West and Zimmerman 1987; West and Fenstermaker 1995; Pascoe 2011). One of the central ways in which inequality is reproduced is through identity performances, whereby individuals reproduce ideas about group difference and help to justify unequal social relations and outcomes (West and Zimmerman 1987; West and Fenstermaker 1995; Bettie 2014).

Boundaries can also, at times, be enabling. Groups and members of collectivities can use and modify symbolic boundaries to either dispute or reframe the meanings attached to social boundaries. Groups often work to differentiate themselves from one another in order to reify or contest identity hierarchies (Tajfel and Turner 1985; Lamont 2000; Armstrong 2002; Hill-Collins 2004; Feinstein 2017; Hamilton et al. 2020). One way in which members of groups are able to achieve this is through boundary-work, where members of groups attempt to delineate who they are and what it means to be a member of a particular group—often in an attempt to differentiate or distance themselves from other groups and stigma (Newman 1999; Kefelas 2002; Armstrong 2002; Lamont and Molnar 2002; Lacy 2007; Ho, Kteily, and Chen 2017).

Symbolic boundaries are especially fruitful for making sense of identities, as they allow us to conceptualize and study both the fluid nature of particular identities (such as race and sexuality) while analyzing the conditions under which identities take on particular significance (Lamont and Molnar 2002). Prior scholarship has contended that identities shape our decisions and experiences (Burke and Stets 2009) but that identities become most consequential in shaping our behavior when they are "activated" or imbued with significance in a given context or situation (Carter 2013). Identities become activated (or seen as contextually significant in shaping our behaviors and decisions) through "situational factors" such as interactions with others that imbue identities with symbolic significance and make them salient (Deaux and Martin 2003; Aquino et al. 2009; Carter 2013). For example, a queer man who did not experience differential treatment on the basis of his sexuality growing up and did not come to see his sexuality as a meaningful form of difference may not believe his career-related decisions to have been influenced by his sexuality, but he may see his sexuality as more meaningfully structuring his behavior and interactions at work after entering into a more hegemonically masculine workplace where being queer serves to challenge his claims to status and mobility, thus activating (or giving symbolic significance to) his sexuality. Identities, then, take on salience and shape behavior and decisions when they are imbued with symbolic significance (Carter 2013). Borrowing from the work on boundaries, a queer man would perceive a bright symbolic boundary surrounding his sexuality in situations or contexts where his identity is activated but may perceive no such bright boundary in contexts where situational factors make his sexuality less salient.

If identities are most likely to be *recognized* as meaningfully guiding decisions and behavior only when they are imbued with symbolic significance, then symbolic boundaries provide us with a particularly useful theoretical tool for illustrating the conditions by which certain identities do or do not become activated. One sphere where identities may take on a particularly deterministic character is with regard to work, in our career decisions, the opportunities we receive, and our ability to navigate the workplace.

Identity and Work

Extant sociological work has demonstrated the central role that identity (both personal and categorical) takes on in the sphere of work, with regard to our career and career-related decisions (Charles and Bradley 2009; Beasley 2012; Cech 2013; Tilcsik, Anteby and Knight 2015, Cech forthcoming), our experiences on the labor market and attempts at securing employment (Royster 2003; Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Correll, Benard and Paik 2007; Smith 2010; Tilcsik 2011; Rivera 2012; Mishel 2016), and in our workplace experiences (Kanter

1977; Acker 1990; Bell and Nkomo 2001; Harvey-Wingfield 2007; Harvey-Wingfield 2010; Cech and Rothwell 2020). Often, identities such as race, gender, and sexuality serve as the basis by which privilege is delineated from disadvantage in the sphere of work, where middle class white culture and identities and hegemonic masculinity are privileged (Anderson 1999; Harvey-Wingfield 2010) and around which work organizations cultures are structured (Kanter 1977; Acker 1990; Harvey-Wingfield 2010). Given the central role that work plays in securing resources, generating security, maximizing life chances and opportunities, and delineating privilege from disadvantage, the sphere of work serves as one of the most consequential sites in generating and reproducing stratification along categorical lines in contemporary society (Blau and Duncan 1967; Griffin and Kalleberg 1981; Young 2000; Royster 2003; Kalleberg 2009; Ridgeway 2011).

Our work experiences and opportunities as well as the ways in which we think of the sphere of work—including the role that work takes on in our lives—are shaped by our various identities (Young 2006; Mullen 2014; Cech forthcoming). Sociological literature has shown that lived experiences (as people of color, women, working class, etc.) are consequential in molding the ways in which individuals think about work. For example, gender socialization and gendered expectations led men in past eras to more often view work as a sphere to acquire resources, status, and stability and women to see it as a sphere for self-expression and the pursuit of passion (Cech 2013; Mullen 2014), though more recent work finds men are beginning to prioritize breadwinning less (Cech 2016, Lamont 2019). Racial and ethnic minorities experiences with systematic racism and stigmatization lead them to be more likely than their white counterparts to see work as a sphere to enact positive change for their racial/ethnic community (Beasley 2012; Cech, Blair-Loy and Rogers 2018). Further, individuals who grew up in lower or working-class backgrounds often see work as a sphere to establish financial security, largely due to their experiences with instability and financial hardship (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Mullen 2014). Thus, even the role that work takes on in individuals' lives is deeply impacted by our various identities.

Our social identities and lived experiences not only shape how we view the sphere of work, they are also immensely impactful in molding the careers that we choose. Occupational segregation has been documented along the lines of gender (Charles and Bradley 2009; Cech 2013), race (Beasley 2012), and sexuality (Tilcsik, Anteby and Knight 2015). Although part of these disparities can be explained by discrimination in hiring, much of it has to do with the (often socially constructed and deeply constrained) career choices that individuals make—with members of different social groups selecting into different careers (Cech 2013). In explaining these persistent patterns of occupational segregation, supply-side explanations have highlighted that these various social identities (such as race and gender) take on a central role in shaping our career decisions because these identities become so deeply rooted in our sense of self, due in large part to socialization beginning in early childhood, that when we make self-expressive decisions, such as what career to enter into, and we reproduce occupational segregation in the aggregate (Martin 1998; Charles and Bradley 2009; Beasley 2012; Cech 2013; Musto 2014; Musto 2019). Though these decisions may be a central mechanism undergirding categorical stratification in the sphere of work, they do so in innocuous ways as individuals are making decisions that, though may be constrained and born out of gendered socialization and/or experiences with inequity, feel self-expressive (Charles and Bradley 2009; Cech 2013).

Social identities also impact both one's ability to garner employment and the strategies individuals use to garner employment. Racial and ethnic minorities (Bertrand and Mullainathan

2004; Pager, Western and Bonikowski 2009), women (Correll et al. 2004; Correll, Benard and Paik 2007), lesbians (Mishel 2016), and gay men (Tilcsik 2011) all suffer an employment disadvantage in terms of hiring when compared to straight-identifying white men, being less likely to be called for interviews or offered employment opportunities. These employment disadvantages are largely rooted in stereotypes surrounding racial/ethnic minorities, women, and queer individuals—who all are viewed by employers as less competent, committed, and relatable when compared to straight-identifying white men (Bell and Nkomo 2001; Correll, Benard and Paik 2007; Tilcsik 2011). These cultural ideas surrounding certain identity groups also impact how members of these groups experience the labor market, often engaging in identity work to distance themselves from the negative stereotypes associated with their identities (Kang et al. 2016).

Our experiences once in the workforce are also shaped by our social identities, both in regard to the ways individuals move through their work organization and with the opportunities afforded to them once there. As noted by Kanter (1977) members of stigmatized or under-represented groups (i.e. tokens) are disadvantaged in the workplace and experience greater visibility and isolation from others when compared to their non-tokenized peers, hindering their ability to move up in their organization. Work has shown these disadvantages to be persistent along the lines of race, gender, and sexuality. More specifically, gendered and racialized cultural expectations follow women and racial/ethnic minorities into the workplace, creating sets of expectations for how they should act and work (Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Harvey-Wingfield 2010; Ridgeway 2011). The result of this is not only that women and people of color are afforded less opportunities at work and are excluded from advantageous social networks (Ridgeway 2011) but also are expected to regulate their emotional displays and act in ways that uphold existing power relations (Hochschild 1983; Harvey-Wingfield 2010). Though far less studied, research suggests this may also be true for queer workers, who also feel constrained both in their identity management strategies and whether and to what extent they feel able to make their sexuality known and salient at work (Ward and Winstanley 2005; Ragins 2008).

Thus, at every stage (career decisions, securing employment, navigating the workforce) and in a multitude of ways, the sphere of work, both in how it is thought about and experienced, is deeply shaped by our social identities. Social identities operate as a source (dis)advantage, shape our career aspirations and decisions, impact our employment opportunities and the strategies we use to gain employment, and influence the ways in which we relate to our work and those in our work organizations.

Visible vs. Invisible Status Characteristics

The vast majority of sociological scholarship on identity and work, with regard to career decisions, securing employment, and navigating the workforce, has focused on visible status characteristics, such as race and gender. Work in this area has contended that these visible status characteristics can become stigmatizing upon categorization (Ridgeway 2011). Given the vast number of people we regularly come into contact with, especially in the realm of work, we quickly categorize others on the basis of visible characteristics, such as race and gender, and we immediately associate a range of stereotypes associated with that particular identity characteristic upon categorization (Ridgeway 2011). The ability for others to immediately categorize individuals with visible status characteristics (such as women and racial/ethnic minorities) is then the first step in generating the interactional inequalities that serve to disadvantage women and people of color in the workforce and constrain the strategies they take up on the labor market and world of work.

As noted by Goffman (1963), the central point of tension for those with an invisible status characteristic is how to manage information about it in each new social setting. Yet, far less is known about how individuals with these status characteristics that are often less visible, such as queer individuals, relate to and negotiate their identity in the world of work. Since one's sexuality *often* operates as an invisible status characteristic (Ragins 2008; Cech and Rothwell 2020), queer individuals have a greater choice with regard to how to embody and perform their sexuality than do those with more visible status characteristics. Given the often invisible nature of sexuality, queer men's interactions with others and own self-conceptions may be more or less shaped by their sexuality. Following this, it may be, then, that one's sexuality takes on a less constraining or determining character than does one's racial or gender identity, which often are immediately assessed in each new setting, allowing queer men the ability to make career decisions, secure employment, and navigate their work organization without experiencing stigmatization on the basis of their sexuality. In the proceeding chapters, I will argue that though the centrality of sexuality in queer men's career narratives varies widely, it often is still articulated as being deeply impactful and constraining. This highlights both that those with often invisible status characteristics take up and think about them in a variety of ways and that these less visible status characteristics can still be immensely constraining with regard to not only their interactions with others but also their career decisions and the strategies they take up on the labor market and workplace. These findings have relevance for not only queer men but also those individuals who have other invisible status characteristics, including persons with certain disabilities, trans persons, and for those whose racial or ethnic identity may not be readily discernable.

Sexuality and The Sphere of Work

Sexuality operates as an often invisible status characteristic (Ragins 2008). Thus, though queer sexualities are devalued and stigmatized, it is not necessarily discernable or read off of the body in the ways that race and gender are commonly thought to be (Ragins 2008). Queer individuals have to regularly think about and negotiate disclosure of their sexuality, considering the potential costs and benefits of doing so in each given context and situation (Ward and Winstanley 2005; Ragins 2008).

In the context of the workplace, there are documented risks of disclosing queer sexualities. This discrimination has been found to take place at the stage of hiring (Tilcsik 2011; Mishel 2016) and in regard to compensation (Waite and Denier 2015; Mize 2016). Further, queer individuals are subject to more subtle disadvantages at work, including exclusion from social networks and having their work devalued, leading queer workers to report more negative work experiences than their straight counterparts (Cech and Rothwell 2020). Given extant research documenting patterns of discrimination against queer individuals in the labor market and workforce more broadly, there is a pressing need to understand the ways in which queer individuals respond to the potential for stigmatization and discrimination in the sphere of work (Tilcsik 2011). Existing research details that one of the ways in which queer individuals circumvent stigmatization and discrimination in the workforce is by engaging in identity management strategies (Ward and Winstanley 2005; Yoshino 2006; Ragins 2008).

Navigating the Workplace

Scholars of sexuality and work have begun to assert that sexuality is a fundamental feature of every workplace (Williams and Giuffre 2011). From work-family policies to partner benefits to informal and taken-for-granted interactional rules at work, sexuality remains a salient dimension of work organizations, privileging some and disadvantaging others (Williams and

Giuffre 2011). Most work organizations are characterized by cultures of heteronormativity, whereby heterosexuality is seen as normal and better than other forms of sexuality (Valocchi 2005; Williams and Giuffre 2011). Further, this culture of heteronormativity often remains invisible, especially to those who are advantaged by it, since it operates in a taken-for-granted fashion and is embedded within long-lasting organizational practices and policies (Williams and Giuffre 2011).

Queer individuals in the workforce respond to the stigma surrounding their sexuality within heteronormative work environments in a variety of ways, largely predicated on their perceptions of the context in which they are operating (Ward and Winstanley 2005; Ragins 2008). Past research documents that individuals attempt to align with ideal worker images in their work organization (Reid 2015). This has important consequences for queer workers, whose sexuality can stand in contrast of what it means to be an ideal or competent worker in certain occupations (Cech and Waidzunas 2011). Queer workers may feel pressure to conceal or downplay their sexuality in certain contexts so as to not encounter disadvantages in the workplace (Waldo 1997; Yoshino 2006; Schilt 2010). While hegemonic masculinity is often privileged in professional workplaces (Berdahl et al. 2018), the extent to which queerness is devalued can vary by occupation and work organization (Williams and Guiffre 2011). To fully understand how queer men negotiate their sexuality in the workplace, I argue that it is important to understand these identity negotiations as being embedded within their given work context.

Whether an individual openly discloses and expresses their sexuality is predicated on a number of factors, including the importance they place on their sexuality, the anticipated consequences of disclosing their sexuality, and how supportive they believe their work environment will be (Dovidio et al. 2000; Ward and Winstanley 2005; Ragins 2008). Queer individuals are more likely to feel like they can be open about their sexuality in environments where there are other openly queer individuals and straight allies and where there are institutional protections and support for queer individuals (Ragins 2008). Queer workers in work organizations that lack visible queer workers and allies and those in workplaces that lack security and protection then are more likely to see their sexuality as impacting their claims to respect and inclusion and engage in status management strategies while at work. Much of the work on sexuality and the workplace centers on decisions of disclosure—whether a queer worker will reveal their sexuality to those around them. I will argue that it is important to move beyond just understanding queer workers decisions to disclose and broaden the discussion to include the ways in which sexuality can shape the work experiences of queer men even after their sexuality is made known.

Recent cultural shifts pertaining to the acceptance of gays and lesbians have helped challenge heteronormative work arrangements and cultures—with many corporations and work organizations now extending partner benefits to same-sex couples and implementing policies that ban discrimination on the basis of sexuality (Williams and Giuffre 2011). Though there has been a sharp increase in the number of “gay-friendly” workplaces (Giuffre et al. 2008; Williams and Giuffre 2011), research suggests that these new workplace cultures pressure queer workers to keep from making their sexuality salient while at work. As Williams and Giuffre (2011) argue, homonormativity may be replacing heteronormativity in these work organizations, opening up greater opportunity for queer workers, but only those who conform to proper performances of white middle class femininity or masculinity. It may be, then, that even queer individuals who prioritize avoiding heteronormative work environments wind up facing pressure once in the workplace to act in ways that reify ideas pertaining to queer respectability or to be out but still cover or downplay their sexuality.

Though much work has been done to explicate the ways in which LGBT individuals embody or enact their sexuality in the workplace, we currently know less about the ways in which college-educated queer individuals think about their sexuality pre-entre into the workforce. Given existing patterns of occupational segregation along the lines of sexuality, there is evidence to suggest that sexuality may play a vital role in shaping the career aspirations of queer individuals (Tilcsik 2011; Ueno, Roach, and Pena-Talamantes 2013; Tilcsik, Anteby and Knight. 2015; Waite and Denier 2015).

Sexuality and Occupational Segregation

Emergent scholarship finds that queer men are over-represented in certain occupations, such as psychology, retail, and other creative fields (Tilcsik, Anteby and Knight 2015) and are often concentrated in gender-atypical occupations (Ueno, Roach and Pena-Talamantes 2013). Both demand and supply-side explanations have been offered to account for these patterns in the labor market. On the demand-side, scholars have pointed toward discrimination faced by queer job seekers in the labor market (Badgett and King 1997). Discrimination toward queer men is more common in occupations that privilege characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity, such as assertiveness (Tilcsik 2011). Discrimination in masculine-typed occupations, then, may lead queer men into gender-atypical occupations due to their inability to garner work in other occupations (Badgett and King 1997; Ueno, Roach, and Pena-Talamantes 2013).

I argue that supply-side perspectives offer a number of potential explanations for queer men’s concentration in certain occupations, including the possibility that queer men are more likely to choose certain occupations over others. Past work has argued that queer men may be over-represented in female-dominated occupations because queer men are more likely to have gender-atypical interests and passions (Whitam and Dizon 1979). Further, queer men may feel less burdened than straight men by cultural expectations to be a breadwinner and financially provide for their family (Berg and Lien 2002; Black et al. 2003). Queer men, then, may feel less pressure to enter into high-paying occupations that are often comprised primarily of straight men (Berg and Lien 2002; Ueno, Roach, and Pena-Talamates 2013).

Though numerous theories have been proposed to account for the occupational segregation of queer men, we currently lack an understanding of the ways in which college-educated queer men make career decisions. Thus, the existing literature has established that sexuality *is* an important and consequential feature in the sphere of work, but we lack an understanding of *how* and *for whom* sexuality takes on importance in workforce.

It is important to note that individuals face a number of structural constraints when making career-related decisions and in securing employment on the labor market (Kalleberg 2009). Yet, a great deal of past work highlights that choice may be central in reproducing patterns of occupational segregation (Charles and Bradley 2009; Cech 2013) and that these career-related decisions are lengthy processes that the college-educated are taught to take seriously (Cech, forthcoming). Further, even if the career-related decisions and labor market experiences of the queer men in my sample were over-determined by structural constraints, the narratives they rely on to make sense of these decisions and experiences on the labor market still matter—as these narratives can reproduce ideas about who can and cannot succeed in certain industries/occupations and can even work to obscure the very structural constraints that are shaping their attempts at securing employment.

A Move Away from A Categorical Approach

In attempting to explain occupational segregation along the lines of sexuality or the identity management strategies that queer workers use within their workplace, most scholarship has operated under the assumption that sexuality *does* impact these decisions and strategies for queer men. Following previous scholarship (Hill-Collins 1990; Somers 1994; Hill-Collins 2004; Moon 2012; Turner 2019), I argue that there is a need to expand on a categorical approach in order to better understand the complex ways in which particular identity categories shape peoples lived experiences. Not only is a great deal of within-category variation left unexplained with a categorical approach[2], but we also may miss the very mechanisms undergirding what makes sexuality so consequential in this sphere by not scrutinizing why sexuality may shape the career decisions and experiences of some queer men and not others.

As previously noted, most work on social identities and career decisions posits that our past experiences and processes of socialization impact our career aspirations and subsequent decisions about what lines of work to enter into (Charles and Bradley 2009; Beasley 2012; Cech 2013; Mullen 2014). Yet, given that sexuality is an identity that one comes into (Ragins 2008; Tilcsik, Anteby and Knight 2015) and not one that is necessarily socialized from an early age, it may be that there is great variation in how central one's sexuality is in structuring one's lived experience.[3] Previous sexualities scholarship has noted that gay-identifying men relate to their sexuality in complex ways. In his study of suburban gay men, Brekhus (2003) found that there was great variation in the centrality that gay identity took on in the lives of his respondents, with some treating it as their master identity and way of viewing the social world, others seeing it as something they could enjoy for sex and socializing, and others seeing it as an important part of who they are but not as something that acts as a primary frame for how they see themselves or move throughout the social world. This work speaks to the multitude of ways in which queer men relate to and think about their sexuality. Further, given that a great deal of the stigmatization of queer men (especially in junior high and high school) lies in their perceived inability to properly embody hegemonic masculinity (Pascoe 2011) it may be that queer men who were better able to embody and perform hegemonic masculinity understand their sexuality as less consequential or stigmatizing than those who felt less able to adhere to strict hegemonically masculine standards.

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[2] Somers (1994) notes that categorical or social identity approaches are those that assume "internally stable concepts, such that under normal conditions entities within that category will act uniformly and predictably" (p. 621).

[3] Past work finds great variation in identity salience among other identity groups as well. In her dissertation, Kennedy Turner demonstrates that Black college students draw on a diverse set of schemas to make sense of their racial identity in a college setting (2019).

Lastly, very little work has considered the experiences of queer men of color when analyzing the role that sexuality plays in queer men’s career decisions and work experiences. In fact, as noted by Hunter (2010) most work pertaining to race or sexuality treat these identities as being separate identity categories, with very little work attending to the lived experiences of queer men of color. Scholars note that this dearth of scholarship centering on queer people of color is due in large part to how hard these populations are to locate (Moore 2006; Ocampo 2012) and the multifaceted ways in which queer people of color relate to and identify with their sexuality (Cantu et al. 2009; Moore 2011; Ocampo 2012). Yet, in privileging the accounts of queer white men or in assuming that queer sexuality operates as a “master identity” for queer men, we leave un-scrutinized the ways in which queer men of color make career decisions and experience the sphere of work. There is reason to believe that the decisions and experiences of queer men in this sphere may vary along racial lines. Extant work has detailed that queer men of color think of and relate to their sexuality in a multitude of ways (Hunter 2010; Ocampo 2012). In his exploration of whether gay Black men identify more with their racial or sexuality, Hunter (2010) rejects the notion that gay Black men all privilege one identity over another, finding that the importance and salience that respondents racial and sexuality took on for them was largely dependent on both context and who they were interacting with and which identity served as a more salient and consequential axes of difference. Similarly, Ocampo (2012) argues that the way in which queer Latino men relate to and perform their gender and sexuality is largely predicated on context and the symbolic value they believe their racial or sexuality carries in certain spaces. Queer Asian men often feel their sexuality rendered to be invisible, due to gendered stereotypes that label queer Asian men as being asexual and feminine (Han 2006).

Queer men of color may be especially constrained in their identity negotiations on the labor market and in the workforce—where both cultural ideas about what it means to be a person of color and queer are heightened (Harvey-Wingfield 2010; Schilt 2010; Pedulla 2014) and identity negotiations are regularly policed (Harvey-Wingfield 2010; Schilt 2010; Ridgeway 2011). How do queer men of color negotiate both of these stigmatizing identity characteristics simultaneously? Emergent work suggests that queer Black men may face an employment advantage over their straight Black and queer white counterparts (Pedulla 2014). Though lacking the data to say, Pedulla (2014) theorizes that this employment advantage may be the result of queer masculinity offsetting the perceived threat of Black masculinity (and vice versa) to employers. This begs the question: what significance does race and sexuality take on for queer Black men in their career decisions and experiences, and how is this shaped by context?

Given the complex relationship between (sexual) identity and career decisions and experiences, I argue that it is best to understand these identities relationally. By that, I mean that it is most fruitful to understand these identities as taking on significance only in relation to other identities and through processes and interactions that constitute an identity as meaningfully different from others (Hill-Collins 1990; Somers 1994; Stets 2000; Lamont and Molnar 2002; Hill-Collins 2004). This helps in moving away from a categorical approach or assuming an identity takes on significance for those who identify with it and allows us to understand why and when sexuality shapes career decisions, attempts at securing employment, and work experiences. Further, this approach will allow us to understand the immense diversity among queer men.

Given their emphasis on relationality, boundaries may be one such tool that help us to both understand the significance that sexuality takes on in queer men's career narratives, allowing for a move away from essentializing their experiences or assuming that sexuality takes on the same significance for all working queer men and towards an understanding of how and for whom sexuality becomes meaningful and consequential with regard to work decisions and experiences.

Before detailing the goals and design of this project, it is important to note that this project is primarily focused on the way in which respondents make sense of their own past and ongoing decisions and experiences. Thus, their responses may be skewed by privileging their own self conceptions and accounts of how their various identities shaped their decisions and experiences. For example, it is possible that respondents offered agentic accounts surrounding their career decisions when they were in fact immensely constrained by their lived experience as being queer, working class, or a person of color. I will elaborate on this point in the methods section below, but I am less concerned with the actual actions of my respondents and instead take particular interest in the ways in which they make sense of them and imbue them with meaning. The narratives we provide to make sense of our lived experience have profound implications and will be discussed further later in this chapter and in subsequent chapters as well.

THE GAPS AND PRESENT STUDY

The current gaps in the literature on sexuality and work are the following: (1) the existing literature has established that sexuality *is* an important and consequential feature in the sphere of work, but we lack an understanding of *how* and *for whom* sexuality takes on importance in workforce, (2) we know very little about the work decisions and experiences of queer men of color and how they may be influenced by their racial and/or sexuality, and (3) work has done little to elucidate how work and work experience shape the way queer men relate to, think about, and embody their sexuality. My study seeks to understand the ways in which queer men make sense of and articulate navigating the world of work. Through in-depth interviews with employed and college-educated queer-identified men working in New York City, the present study asks: (1) In what ways do queer men believe their career aspirations and decisions were shaped by their sexuality, and (2) What meaning do queer men believe their sexuality takes on in the labor market and at work, and how does this shape the strategies they report using to navigate the workforce? By interviewing queer men already in the workplace, this study can examine the significance that these boundaries take on post entre into the workplace, illuminating not only how respondents believe their various identities shaped their career decisions but also how their careers worked to impact and shape their self-conceptions.

METHODS

To answer these questions, I conducted 67 interviews between May of 2018 and October of 2019 with queer-identifying, college educated men who were living and working in the New York City Metropolitan Area. Though respondents most often identified as gay (N=61), others identified as bisexual (N=2) or queer (N=4). For the purposes of this study I use the term queer to refer to the sexuality of my respondents, as it encompasses a range of queer sexualities. I restricted this study to only those men who are college educated both to understand how queer men choose occupations and majors while in college and also because those with at least a college education have greater options in how they choose occupations due to the college degree.

I chose New York City as my site of analysis due to both its large queer population and racial diversity. New York City has the largest population of queer people of color in the country (Moore 2011). Utilizing New York City as the site to conduct this research made recruitment easier and allowed me to access a diverse array of participants who vary by both occupation and across a wide range of demographics. Very few of my respondents (less than 10) were born and raised in New York—suggesting that New York City may be an especially fruitful site to understand how queer men understand the world of work, bringing together men with vastly different backgrounds and life experiences. Further, past research on queer college students have noted that many aspire to move to large, progressive cities with large queer populations (Ueno et al. 2018) and that they form their career aspirations with these locations in mind—helping to ease their fear of potential discrimination on the labor market. Interviewing queer men living in New York City allowed me to understand whether respondents articulate facing employment or work-related discrimination in these contexts and the ways in which living in a progressive city known for its large queer population impacted how respondents made career-related decisions. For example, do queer men living in New York City report that the climate towards LGBTQ individuals allows them to make career decisions that they feel they would not be able to make elsewhere? Is it a site where queer men feel they may face less stigmatization in stereotypically heteronormative occupations?

I used interviews for the purposes of this study because this method allowed me to gain an understanding of the ways in which queer men *make sense* of their identities and how they operate and impact their experiences in the world of work. Interviews as a method are particularly well-suited for exploring how individuals articulate and understand boundaries (Lamont et al. 2016). A potential critique of using interviews for this study could be that I am not able to get at the actual actions these men make on the labor market or workforce. Though true and important to consider, I am less concerned with the actual actions of these men than I am with participants own understandings and cultural narratives they are drawing on to make sense of the social world and their lived experiences within it. The narratives that these men draw on to make sense of their past experiences and future opportunities have implications—as narratives hold the potential to challenge or give weight to existing social arrangements and inequalities (Ewick and Silbey 1995; Ewick and Silbey 2003; Ueno et al. 2018). For example, if queer men couch the past constraints that they have faced as being matters of personal choice and responsibility, this has the potential to obscure the ways in which the cultural devaluation of queer sexual identities fosters inequalities along the lines of sexuality. Further, the ways in which we think about or understand the social world shapes our actions within it (Young 2006; Lamont et al. 2016). If queer men believe that certain arenas of work are unfavorable to queer men or that they would not be able to succeed in certain occupations because of their sexuality, it is likely that this will impact their likelihood of choosing these occupations or will at least influence how they perform their identity once in these workplaces. Further, interviews are ideal for both capturing relational processes and highlighting within-category diversity (Lamont 2000; Lamont and Molnar 2002). In turning to respondents' own narratives, the present study can better understand both if and why respondents believe their sexuality meaningfully impacted their career decisions and experiences, leaving open the possibility that sexuality did not operate in meaningful or consequential ways in respondents' career narratives. Rather than assuming that sexuality is a defining feature in queer men's career narratives, the present study opens this up as an empirical question, and in so doing, is better able to explicate why it takes on significance in some respondents' narratives and not others.

I conducted 67 semi-structured interviews, which followed a general framework but allowed for adjustment as new stories emerged[4]. Interviews ranged between 1 and 3 hours, with most lasting 1.5 hours. Interviews focused on respondents' experiences growing up, going to school, coming into understandings of their sexuality, their career aspirations and how they have evolved, their experiences applying for jobs and navigating the interview process, and their experiences once in the workplace. Methodologically, I took a more holistic approach than most other studies exploring sexuality and the labor market/workforce, which have focused on one outcome (i.e. college major, occupation choice). Extant research documents that experiences at one stage of the life course can impact the decisions individuals make in later stages (Ueno et al. 2018).

To recruit participants, I utilized snowball sampling and selective recruitment methods. Though it comes with limitations, snowball sampling is a fruitful method of recruitment when working with populations who are harder to reach (Moore 2011). Further, this method of recruitment allowed me to recruit from specific occupations so that no one occupation was over-represented. At the end of each interview I asked participants if they had friends in specific occupations that were not well-represented in my sample. It was through snowball sampling that I was able to recruit participants who were in occupations that queer men tend to be less concentrated in, such as finance and engineering. I utilized selective recruitment methods, such as postings to group listservs and in social media groups for queer professionals working or looking for work in New York City. Though I was able to attain a handful of respondents through online or listserv postings, these attempts were largely unsuccessful. I found that respondents were much more likely to agree to sit down for an interview with me if somebody else (most often another respondent) both helped to connect us and vouched that the interview was important and enjoyable. This was especially true for queer respondents of color, who on multiple occasions noted that they were previously suspicious of my intentions before sitting down for the interview—due in large part to me being white. Once they agreed to participate, I allowed respondents to select a location and time that would work best for them. Most interviews were conducted in coffee shops in Manhattan or Brooklyn either during respondents' lunch breaks or after they got off of work. On a few occasions, respondents asked to do the interviews in their apartments or work offices. Racially, 30 identified as white, 12 as Black, 16 as Hispanic, 3 as Asian American, 3 as South Asian, and 3 as mixed-race. They ranged in age from 22 to 60, though the vast majority were between the ages of 24 and 31. In total, 40 respondents were between 20 and 29, 21 respondents were between 30 and 39, 3 respondents were between 40 and 49, 2 respondents were between 50 and 59, and 1 respondent was over the age of 60. As demonstrated in Table 1, they were employed in a wide range of occupations and industries.

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[4] See appendix for the interview guide

Researcher Positionality

I believe my own identities and positionality had an impact on project design, respondent recruitment, and likely my data analysis. As white, cis-gender man who identifies as gay/queer and was raised in a working class household, my identities were at times consistent, but more often were inconsistent (to varying degrees) with those of my respondents—who all identified as "queer" but were diverse in terms of how they thought about their sexuality, their racial identities, and class backgrounds.

Initially, this project began as an exploration of how college educated queer men of color (and particularly queer Black men) negotiated their gender, racial, and sexual identities in predominantly white workplaces. After initial interviews, the scope of this project changed and the population of interest broadened to include queer-identifying, college-educated men living and working in New York across all racial identities. Yet, these initial interviews with queer men of color set the tone for subsequent interviews, both in the populations I interviewed and in the re-working of my interview guide. My very first interview for this project was with a man I will refer to as Marcus, a 26-year-old Black man working in a law firm on Wall Street. A mutual friend connected us, and he seemed very interested in the topic of the interview from our email exchanges. Our interview went as well as I could have hoped—it lasted for close to 3 hours, he stayed after to talk about the various topics covered during the interview at greater length, and he promised to help me with recruitment. After the interview, he relayed initially feeling skeptical about participating in the interview because I am white, and, as he noted, white researchers often do not do justice to the narratives of their Black respondents, especially when they are also queer. He expressed that my racial identity would likely be an impediment to recruiting queer men of color to participate—noting that he would ask his friends if they wanted to participate but that they likely would not have much interest in sitting down with a white researcher to talk about their experiences as a queer Black man in the workforce. This experience highlighted for me, very early on, that I would have to be conscious of both my recruitment efforts and my own positionality during my interviews.

My white racial identity only became more salient as my interviews went on. Given my initial focus on queer men of color and my early recruiting efforts aimed at these groups, most of my respondents at the start were queer men of color. I was met with skepticism during almost every single interview as respondents tried to gauge my intentions—with some directly asking why I, as a white man, was interested in studying the experiences of queer men of color. My 5th interview was with a man I refer to as Rohan (South Asian, 26, social worker/community organizer), who had been referred to me by an earlier interview respondent. At the start of the interview, I got the impression that he was either wary of my intentions or was not interested in participating—as he replied to most of my questions with only a few words and offered up little more when asked follow-up questions. He became much more comfortable as the interview turned to questions about race and centered on his experiences as a queer person of color. The interview lasted for nearly 2 hours, and I made it a point after the interview to ask how he felt about the interview. He, like Marcus, noted being skeptical of my intentions at the start of the interview. He divulged that he nearly did not participate in the interview due to my white racial identity but that his friend who had previously participated told him that he felt comfortable talking about race and being critical of whiteness during our interview, which Rohan noted as having convinced him to participate. Thus, despite the initial discomfort many respondents of color (particularly Black respondents) noted with being interviewed about identity-related issues by a white man, I found that centering race from the beginning of the interview set a tone that these were issues they could talk freely about and possibly also indicated that these were issues I myself was not ignorant of. Similar to the accounts of other scholars doing research on queer populations (Connell 2018), I believe that had I assumed a homogenous "queer experience" in my research design—where all queer men thought about and related to their sexuality in similar ways—I may have not only missed out on critical data points but also lost the trust of those queer respondents of color who were already wary about the lens a white man would bring to this research project. It also could be the case that queer respondents of color in my sample did not feel as comfortable sharing thoughts about race and sexuality with me as they would be with a Black interviewer—out of a concern that I wouldn't share their thoughts or would not be comfortable hearing them. I also believe that one advantage to my "outsider" status was that queer men of color often (rightfully) did not assume that I had any understanding of their experiences as queer men of color and often spent a great deal of time and care explaining to me how their lived experience is likely different from that of a queer white man, which may have not been the case (to the same extent) if they were being interviewed by someone that they felt more similarly aligned with their lived experience.

My lived experience also differed from the upper-middle-class queer white men in my sample with more masculine gender presentations, who played sports in high school and rarely experienced bullying. I was careful, both in the construction of the interview guide and during the interview, to avoid assuming that queer sexuality would mean the same or even similar things to all of my respondents. It is still important to note, however, that my own lived experience as someone whose queer identity is central to their self-conception likely did impact not only the follow-up questions that I asked the respondents but also the lens through which I analyzed the data, as I believe my own lived experience made the *silences* in the narratives (lack of bullying, stigmatization, etc.) more salient for me. Further, it is likely that without my lived experience and queer identity, I may never have even arrived at this project as a dissertation topic. Yet, as Connell (2018) wrote, "…the pursuit of queer research is not the *resolution* of ambivalence, contradiction, or failure in the field, but rather, the *recognition*—to tolerate the uncertainty and the vulnerability, the pleasures and the pains of the work, and to keep asking, keep thinking, keep writing, keep fighting in the face of it" (p. 138).

DATA ANALYSIS

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed fully. I utilized a dual-pass coding strategy to code and analyze my data (Saldana 2011). During the first pass, I identified the central themes inductively, creating codes out of themes and patterns emerging from the data (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). Drawing on the emergent themes from the first pass, I coded more specifically during the second pass for why sexuality did or did not shape respondents' decisions and experiences, respondents' ideas about what it means to work in a given line of work and how this related to their sexuality, the mechanisms at work that imbued sexuality with significance, and the identity negotiations respondents undertook on the labor market and in the workforce. Further, I utilized a grounded theory approach for data analyzation (Charmaz 2006), whereby I conducted line-by-line coding to observe emerging patterns in my data. This allowed me to revise my interview guide as needed and be better able to engage in theoretical sampling as the analytical categories became more apparent. For instance, in my original interview guide, I gave little attention to respondents junior high and high school experiences. Yet, in coding the first 15 or so interviews, queer men's negative experiences (or lack thereof) with straight men in high school emerged as one of the most salient themes in the data and one that meaningfully differentiated the narratives of men who saw sexuality as important to their career decisions from those who did not believe it played an important role. These early coding efforts made salient that experiences growing up and (dis)comfort around straight men were topics that warranted more attention during my interviews. Further, iterative coding helped to highlight that the narratives queer men were offering largely differed along occupational lines—specifically, that queer men employed in more masculine-typed occupations or industries differed from those employed in more feminine or queer-typed occupations in how central their sexuality was in their career decisions and how they navigated the workplace. Around my 35th interview, I began a more targeted recruitment process, where I specifically sought out men who were employed in more masculine-typed occupations (such as finance, business, and STEM) to ensure they had adequate representation in my sample and to better capture the ways in which their narratives differed from those employed in more stereotypically queer or feminine occupations.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The central argument of this project is that the role that one's sexuality plays in shaping career decisions and experiences on the labor market and workforce is predicated on the perceived boundary brightness surrounding their sexuality and that this symbolic significance is subject to change across stages in one's career narrative. For the purposes of this project, I define boundary brightness as the extent to which one's sexuality is activated, or imbued with symbolic significance, at each given stage of the career narrative. This boundary brightness was shaped by how meaningful and consequential of a *difference* queer men believed their sexuality to be during a give career stage and how central their sexuality was to their self-conception. This boundary brightness was deeply relational—it took on a brighter property when respondents saw it as something that made them meaningfully different from straight-identifying men in a given stage or context. To illustrate this, I break respondents up into 4 groups, based on the boundary brightness across the three stages of their career narratives: (1) the Consistently Bright group, who saw their sexuality as shaping every stage of their career narratives, (2) the Dimmed Boundaries group, who saw their sexuality as having impacted their career decisions but not their labor market or workplace experiences, (3) the Brightened Boundaries group, who did not see their sexuality as having impacted their career decisions but as something that became more consequential in their experiences on the labor market or once in the workforce, and (4) the Never Bright group, who noted not having perceived their sexuality as being impactful at any stage in their career narrative. In the next chapter, I describe in greater detail the four analytic groups I use in this project to make sense of the significance respondents attributed to their sexuality throughout their career narratives.

So then what role did sexuality play in shaping queer men's career decisions? I explore this question in Chapter 3, by asking to what extent men in my sample believed their career and career-related decisions had been influenced by their sexuality. This chapter argues that whether respondents perceive their sexuality as having meaningfully shaped their career-related decisions is predicated on (1) the meaning they attributed to their sexuality, (2) how central their sexuality was to their self-conceptions. Respondents who believe their sexuality to be consequential and/or central to their self-conceptions perceive a bright boundary surrounding their sexuality. This boundary brightness was chiefly shaped by their past experiences with bullying or stigmatization on the basis of their perceived or actual queer sexuality while in junior high or high school, mostly perpetrated by straight-identifying boys. These past experiences led those some respondents to seek out safe spaces where they could be affirmed and accepted or into areas of study that allowed them to make sense of their own experiences and/or advocate for change. Those without such experiences in junior high or high school, however, perceived no such bright boundary surrounding their sexuality at this stage of their career narratives and reported that their sexuality did not meaningfully influence their career-related decisions. This was also deeply racialized—the majority of queer men of color reported that though their sexuality did not shape their career-related decisions, they did believe their racial identity helped to shape their career aspirations. This was largely because many queer men of color understood their racial identity as both central to their self-understanding and as something that served as a meaningful and consequential axis of difference—whereas their sexuality was seen as less consequential and central to the ways in which they experienced the social world. Thus, queer men of color most often perceived a bright boundary surrounding their racial identity and a dim boundary surrounding their sexuality at this stage of their career narratives. Chapter 3 highlights the importance of past experiences in shaping how queer men understand their sexuality and make sense of their career decisions.

Chapter 4 highlights respondents' experiences navigating the labor market and attempting to secure employment after finishing college. More specifically, this chapter asks (1) what significance did respondents believe their sexuality took on in the labor market and (2) how were their experiences on the labor market impacted by their sexuality? This chapter finds that whether respondents believed that their experiences on the labor market were shaped by their sexuality was predicated on the perceived consequences of being queer in their chosen line of work. These perceived consequences were largely tied to ideas about what constitutes an ideal worker in their field and their perceived distance from this image. Respondents who were seeking employment in industries or occupations where they believed the ideal worker to be masculine presenting and straight perceived a bright boundary surrounding their sexuality on the labor market, whereas those seeking employment in industries or occupations where they believed the ideal worker to be queer or as not explicitly straight-identifying did not perceive a bright boundary surrounding their sexuality on the labor market. This boundary brightness shaped the strategies that queer men used to garner employment—with those perceiving a bright boundary and distance between themselves and their industries or occupations ideal worker image having to respond to this distance by either (1) aligning more strictly with hegemonically masculine gender presentations and performances or (2) by making their sexuality salient and known to assess organizational climate and acceptance. Those who did not perceive a bright boundary or distance between themselves and their ideal worker image reported no particular identity negotiation or management on the labor market, but rather, felt free to act in ways that felt authentic to them. This chapter highlights that cultural schemas (such as the ideal worker) and cultural ideas about what it means to be queer in a given occupation or industry are central to the ways queer men understand and navigate the labor market.

Chapter 5 details the significance respondents sexuality takes on in shaping their experiences in the workplace and the workforce more broadly, asking the following: what significance did queer men believe their sexuality took on in the workforce, and how did this shape their identity management strategies within it? Further, in what ways did their experiences in the workforce impact how they thought about and related to their sexuality? This chapter posits that the significance respondents' sexuality takes on at work and the identity management strategies they use in the workplace are dependent on both the context-specific valorized forms of cultural capital of their workplace or work organization and which expressions are valorized. Further, this chapter demonstrates that while identities can shape career-related decisions and work experiences, work also has the potential to shape our self-conceptions and the ways in which individuals enact and embody their various identities. Respondents in work organizations or industries where hegemonic masculinity or stereotypical notions of what it means to be a queer man operate as dominant forms of cultural capital[5] perceive bright boundaries surrounding their sexuality, largely because the valorization of these forms of cultural capital work to make queer sexuality more salient and consequential in these contexts. Respondents in work organizations or industries where the context-specific valorized forms of cultural capital are less restrictive—not explicitly masculine or stereotypically queer—perceive no such bright boundary surrounding their sexuality at work, and thus, do not report undertaking any specific identity management strategies at work. Those respondents who do perceive a bright boundary at work most often respond to this by either more strictly aligning with hegemonically masculine gender performances and presentations (where hegemonic masculinity serves as a valorized form of cultural capital) or by performing femininity to align more closely with stereotypical notions of what it means to be a queer man (where stereotypical notions of queerness operate as a valorized form of cultural capital). Once in the workforce, many queer men of color are met with expectations from their white co-workers to align more closely with stereotypical notions of queerness and report doing so by "leveraging femininity" (Hamilton et al. 2020) in order to offset the perceived threat surrounding Black masculinity in predominantly white contexts. This chapter also speaks to the ways in which work shapes queer men's sexuality. For respondents in the "Brightened Boundaries" group, though their sexuality did not meaningfully shape their career decisions, it became central to how they navigated the workforce. These respondents were met with expectations of what it means to be a queer man in their line of work and came to understand that there were benefits for aligning with these expectations and consequences for not doing so. These expectations and mechanisms of accountability made sexuality more central in

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[5] This conceptualization of cultural capital breaks slightly from Bourdieu (1984), who argued that cultural capital is something that can be used by groups in power to differentiate themselves

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and reinscribe hierarchies and systems of inequality. Yet, others (such as Carter (2005), Reich (2010) and Ocampo (2012) posit that this ignores the various ways in which members of socially marginalized groups can both have and use cultural capital to secure symbolic and material resources in a given context. I elaborate more on this my use of cultural capital in Chapter 5.

these respondent’s self-conceptions and changed the ways in which they thought about and related to their sexuality—seeing it now as both consequential and as something that meaningfully shaped their lived experiences. Respondents in the “Consistently Bright” group entered into industries that both privileged hegemonic masculinity and had greater opportunities for men who could believably “play straight.” Though all respondents in this group reported being led into their career due in large part to their experiences as a queer man, they came to understand their sexuality as a basis for disadvantage in their chosen line of work, which altered the ways in which they understood and related to their sexuality. Respondents in this group most often noted working both in and outside of work to align more closely with hegemonic masculinity in order to believably be read as straight. Thus, not only can our identities influence our career decisions but so too can our work experiences shape how we think about and relate to our various identities.

Finally, in the conclusion I end by discussing the implications that this study has for existing scholarship, policy, and educators. First, I argue that this study highlights the immense within-category diversity that exists among college-educated queer men. By allowing queer men to discuss for themselves what was most important or consequential for them at the various stages of their career narratives, I was better able to explore both why and when sexuality becomes consequential for queer men in the world of work. I found great diversity in the narratives queer men offered, finding that the significance that they attributed to their sexuality at any given stage was predicated both on their self-understandings and the symbolic significance their sexuality took on at any given stage. When one’s sexuality was central to their self-conceptions and/or seen as consequential, respondents perceived a bright symbolic boundary surrounding their sexuality—understanding it as something that operates as a meaningful form of difference, especially in relation to straight-identifying men. Whether queer men in this sample understood their sexuality as being central to their self-understanding or as a consequential axes of difference was fostered by (1) past experiences that demarcated queer sexuality as a significant form of difference, (2) cultural schemas, such as the ideal worker, that delineate who can and cannot be successful in a given line of work, and (3) context-specific cultural capital that can make queer sexuality more or less salient in a given work organization.

This project also makes significant contributions to the scholarly discussions of sexuality, boundaries, and the world of work. Given the wide diversity with regard to the career narratives and the immense within-category diversity highlighted in this study, I argue that categorical approaches are largely unable to explain the significance that sexuality, or any other identity category, takes on in the world of work. Such approaches miss why sexuality or any other social characteristic can be impactful and under what conditions it becomes more or less impactful. This study highlights that sexuality takes on meaning relationally within contexts and interactions where queer sexuality comes to be seen as a significant axes of difference. I argue that it is not the form of social difference, such as sexuality, that shapes queer men's work experiences and decisions in the world of work but rather the symbolic boundary and significance surrounding their sexuality at any given stage.

Further, this project argues that scholarship would benefit from centering masculinity in discussions of sexuality and work. Masculinity was chief in structuring queer men's feelings of difference from straight men, which was paramount in shaping their subsequent career decisions. Masculinity was also central to how well queer men saw themselves aligning with a given industry or organizations once on the labor market. Further the extent to which masculinity was valorized in a given work organization was central in shaping the strategies queer men undertook in navigating their workplace. Masculinity, then, serves as a boundary brightening or blurring mechanism for queer men at each stage of their career narrative. This study demonstrates the need to consider masculinity when we discuss queer men and work, as it was central to the formation of queer men's career aspirations and decisions as well as the significance they attribute to their sexuality once on the labor market and in the workforce. Importantly, I also argue that this project contributes to the literature on the intersection of race, masculinity, and sexuality in queer men's career narratives. Little existing scholarship has sought to understand the experiences of queer men of color, and even less have taken up this effort with regard to their career decisions and experiences. I argue that the career decisions and labor market/workplace experiences of college-educated queer men are deeply racialized. For many queer men of color, and more specifically for queer Black men, sexuality took on a less significant meaning when making career decisions but became far more significant after entering onto the labor market and once in the workforce. Both on the labor market and in the workplace, queer Black men relied on racialized and gendered performances to highlight their queer sexuality in order to downplay the perceived risks associated with their racial identity in predominantly white spaces. This project contends that in subverting ideas about race, queer men of color (but particularly queer Black men) feel accountable to adhere to more stereotypical gendered performances that both reify ideas about queerness and embolden its place on the masculine hierarchy more broadly.

The conclusion ends by highlighting both the diverse and fluid significance sexuality took on in the career narratives of college-educated queer men—varying by stage and heavily predicated on context. This project demonstrates the need to move away from conceptualizing queer men as a group that shares similar experiences and acts on the grounds of similar attributes. There is great diversity with regard to queer men's lived experiences and the role that sexuality takes on in structuring them, which all work to shape the significance queer men attribute to their sexuality in structuring their career decisions and experiences. I end with a discussion of the implications this study has both for policy and K-12 educators.

CHAPTER 2

The Significance of Sexuality in the World of Work: For Whom and When Does Sexuality Matter?

To understand both the diverse ways queer men understand and experience the world of work as well as the ways in which sexuality can take on different meanings at different stages, I turn to the career narratives that employed queer men offered, focusing specifically on 3 distinct yet related stages in their narratives: (1) their career-related decisions, (2) securing employment, and (3) navigating their workplace. Career narratives are stories that individuals offer to make sense of their career decisions, histories, and changes (Heinz 2002; Martin and Wajcman 2004; Ueno et al. 2018). Utilizing narratives allows respondents to make sense of their own experiences and allows respondents to invoke sexuality where they see it as important and to not invoke it when they see their decisions and understandings as having been shaped by other factors. These narratives, then, are helpful in understanding both within-category diversity (Somers 1994), and the mechanisms underlying why some respondents understand their sexuality as central to their career decisions and experiences and others see their sexuality as being distinct from the sphere of work entirely.

Much of the existing literature on queer populations in the workforce ignores the vast diversity among queer individuals, either in assuming that sexuality impacts career decisions or in contending that sexuality is a defining feature in the labor market or workforce experiences of queer individuals. Yet, extant work has argued that even those individuals who share a social identity can have vastly different self-understandings and experiences (Brekhus 2003; Somers

1994; Hill-Collins 2004; Hunter 2010; Moon 2012; Turner 2019; Hamilton et al. 2020), including gay-identifying men (Brekhus 2003). Aligning with this work, I find great diversity in the career narratives of respondents. I argue that whether respondents saw their sexuality as significant in their career-related decisions and in the sphere of work was chiefly predicated on respondents' self-understandings and how bright of a *symbolic boundary* they perceived between themselves and hegemonically masculine straight men. As discussed in the introduction, symbolic boundaries are the "conceptual distinctions" that individuals make that both separate people into groups and establish feelings of similarity and difference from others (Lamont and Molnar 2002). It is through these boundaries that identity characteristics, such as sexuality, are imbued with symbolic significance and meaning. Whether sexuality shaped queer men's career narratives was a matter of the symbolic significance that this identity took on at any given stage. This boundary activation is the result of a dynamic interplay of internal (self-conceptions) and external (constraints/enforcement) factors. This boundary can shape queer men's career decisions and the strategies they use on the labor market, but their careers and chosen industries can also activate, blur, or brighten this boundary. Thus, this project speaks to how identities can influence the ways in which individuals make choices and navigate the world of work as well as illustrates how work can shape identity.

Understanding Difference: For Whom and When Does Sexuality Matter?

I find that sexuality matters for different respondents and different stages in their career narratives. For some, their sexuality took on significance in their major and career decisions, whereas others did not see it as significant until they reached the labor market or entered into the workforce. Others, however, believed that their sexuality was never significant with regard to work. As noted above, sexuality mattered most for those respondents who perceived a "bright boundary” surrounding their sexuality, which was both internally (an important part of their self-understanding) and externally (a consequential and potential disadvantageous axis of difference) imposed.

I break respondents in this project into 4 distinct groups. These groups demarcate different processes of boundary articulation and brightness across 3 stages in their career narratives: (a) their career and career-related decisions, (b) navigating the labor market and securing employment, and (c) navigating their workplace. These 4 groups vary in terms of the symbolic significance attributed to their sexuality during these 3 stages of their career narratives. Classifying respondents is theoretically useful, both in demonstrating the ways in which respondents believed their sexuality became more or less meaningful in shaping their experiences at different stages, and also for other scholars to make sense of not only the career narratives of queer men but also those of other stigmatized groups as well. The first group, called “*Consistently Bright*”, saw their sexuality as central to every aspect of their career narratives, including their career decisions, the strategies they used to garner employment, and how they navigated their workplace. The second group, “*Dimmed Boundaries*”, believed that their sexuality was *central* in shaping their career decisions but that it became less salient in differentiating their experiences on the labor market and in the workforce. The third group, “*Brightened Boundaries,*” reported that their sexuality took on little to no significance in their career decisions but that it eventually became central to their experiences on the labor market and/or in the workforce. Lastly, the “*Never Brightened Boundaries*” group never understood their sexuality as consequential in shaping their career decisions, labor market experiences, or experiences once in the workforce .

Group 1—“Consistently Bright”

13 respondents fell into the “Consistently Bright” group. Respondents in this group understood their sexuality as being salient in all aspects of their career narratives. In detailing their career decisions, respondents noted that past experiences with homophobia or stigma on the basis of their (often perceived) sexuality, predominantly with straight men in junior high and high school, led them to perceive a bright symbolic boundary between themselves and straight men. This often resulted in seeking out spaces where they could be accepted and affirmed, which led them into their passions and interests, such as theatre, art, or dance. Alternatively, a few men purposefully sought out more masculine and high-status majors and career fields as a way of compensating for perceived stigma. The career decisions of these respondents worked to impact their experience on the labor market in meaningful ways, as these men entered into professions that privileged hegemonic masculinity—or at least the ability to believably embody it—leaving respondents perceiving a bright boundary between themselves and their chosen field’s ideal worker image. This perceived bright boundary shaped their identity management strategies on the labor market, as they conveyed a particular pressure to pass as straight and/or hegemonically masculine in their attempts to garner employment. Once in the workforce, they felt the need to cover or downplay their sexuality, while simultaneously presenting themselves as masculine, due to the masculine context-specific valorized forms of cultural capital they understood as being pervasive in their chosen industry.

Group 2—“Dimmed Boundaries”

20 respondents fell into the “Dimmed Boundaries” group. Although respondents believed their sexuality was central to their career decisions, their sexuality was less salient to them on the labor market and once in the workforce, due in large part to the careers that they entered into. Respondents reported similar narratives with regard to their career decisions as those in the

"Consistently Bright" group in that they had experienced bullying and stigma growing up and believed their sexuality meaningfully shaped their career and career-related decisions. Yet, they were led into different types of careers than those in the "Consistently Bright" group. Instead of articulating an indirect relationship (like respondents in the "Consistently Bright" group), where experiences on the basis of their sexuality led them to a passion or interest which eventually became their career ("theatre offered me a safe space to be myself"), those in the "Dimmed Boundaries" group reported a more direct relationship between their sexuality and career decisions—noting that their sexuality served as the primary basis for their chosen career ("I chose my career to fight against the inequities gay men face"). Most respondents in the "Dimmed Boundaries" group were led into LGBTQ-related research or activism/community organizing with an explicitly queer focus. Similar to those in the "Consistently Bright" group, the career decisions of those in the "Dimmed Boundaries" group did influence their experience navigating the labor market, though in markedly different ways. Respondents in the "Dimmed Boundaries" group saw their sexuality as either being an asset or largely insignificant on the labor market because they believed that most people in their chosen industry would either be queer or a woman. Thus, they perceived a lack of a boundary between themselves and their industry's ideal worker. Once in the workplace, respondents worked in organizations that were predominantly queer or majority women who they perceived as accepting of queer people. Thus, they felt no need to negotiate their sexuality in *any* particular way (having to play it up or down), and they noted not having to think about their sexuality much while at work because of the range of acceptable gender and sexual presentations witnessed among their co-workers and the leadership within their organization. I argue that the central feature delineating the labor market and workplace experiences of those in the "Dimmed Boundaries" and "Consistently Bright" groups was the *salience* of their sexuality at these stages and in these contexts, which was predicted on how different they believed their sexuality made them from others in these spaces.

Group 3—"Brightened Boundaries"

18 respondents fell into the "Brightened Boundaries" group. Respondents in the "Brightened Boundaries" group believed that their sexuality was of little significance in the early stages of their careers and that it became more central when navigating the labor market and/or workforce. Importantly, this was the only group where a majority of the respondents are queer men of color, with 15 being men who identified as non-white. With regard to their career decisions, respondents expressed that their sexuality played no significant role, either directly or indirectly, in shaping their career decisions. They noted that this was because either (1) their sexuality was not central to their self-understanding at the time these decisions were made, (2) they did not see their sexuality as a potentially consequential axis of difference, and/or (3) they felt as though another one of their social identities, such as their race or class, more meaningfully influenced their career decisions. Yet, nearly half of the respondents in the "Brightened Boundaries" group noted that their sexuality took on greater significance in the labor market, either because they recognized their sexuality as something that could disadvantage them in securing employment, because they saw their sexuality as something that could offset the stigma associated with their racial identity, or because their sexuality was now central to their self-understanding and they did not want to work in a place where they could not be out. Respondents in the "Brightened Boundaries" group responded to this tension in three different ways: (1) by attempting to pass as straight by playing up their masculinity during job interviews, (2) by attempting to make their sexuality salient by crafting a more feminine gender presentation, or (3) by disclosing their sexuality. The strategy was largely predicated on the importance they placed

on being out at work and the perceived consequences of being openly gay in their work. Respondents most often entered into either more masculine-typed occupations or predominantly white work organizations and felt the need to engage in identity management strategies. The particular identity negotiations that they engaged in (i.e. playing up their masculinity, embracing a stereotypically queer presentation) was dependent on the context-specific forms of cultural capital valorized in their work organization and was often deeply racialized.

Group 4—"Never Bright"

Lastly, 16 respondents belonged to the "Never Bright" group. They believed that their career decisions and experiences were in no way impacted by their sexuality. Similar to those in the "Brightened Boundaries" group, respondents in the "Never Bright" group reported that their sexuality took on no significance in influencing their career decisions. Respondents largely believed that their sexuality was completely separate from their abilities and passions. Further, respondents typically held more masculine self-conceptions and reported little difficulty navigating hegemonically masculine, heteronormative environments. Relatedly, those in the "Never Bright" group did not report bullying, homophobia, or stigma on the basis of their sexuality growing up, and most came from (upper) middle class households. These respondents endorsed a meritocratic worldview, which shaped their conceptions of the labor market, contending that their sexuality did not and should not have any impact because they believed that jobs went to the most qualified candidates. They also noted that it would not only be strange for sexuality to come up during a job interview but also that it is not legal for employers to inquire about such things. Respondents did not ever bring up or signal their sexuality during job interviews and did not note feeling the need to negotiate their sexuality or gender presentation when seeking employment. Once in the workforce, these respondents felt that their sexuality was and should be separate from their work and the opportunities afforded to them at work. Though most, but not all, of the respondents are out to at least some in their organization, they did not see it as a salient feature of their working lives and did not report having to play up or down their sexuality at work.

Throughout the rest of this manuscript, I reference these four groups to make sense of the significance respondents believed their sexuality had in shaping career decisions and experiences as well as the ways in which this sometimes changed over the course of respondents' career narratives. The rest of this manuscript will detail the 3 different stages of queer men's career narratives, attending to the experiences that respondents had in selecting careers, navigating the labor market, and once in the workforce while paying particular attention to for whom and why sexuality did or did not meaningfully shape respondents' experiences across the various stages of the career narrative. Next, I turn to the first stage: career-related decisions.

CHAPTER 3

Making Career-Related Decisions and Choosing Careers

INTRODUCTION

Queer populations are one of the least studied social groups in the workforce (Ragins 2008; Tilscik, Anteby and Knight 2015). Yet, occupational segregation along the lines of sexual orientation is both pervasive and longstanding. Queer identifying men have long been shown to concentrate in certain occupations and industries, commonly referred to as "occupational ghettos" (Baumle, Compton, and Poston 2009; Berube 2011). Dating back to the work of Havelock Ellis (1897), researchers have noted an over-representation of queer workers in certain occupations, yet explanations for this segregation are often competing and incomplete. One such reason for this ambiguity, as Tilscik and colleagues (2015) note, may be that the occupations that queer men concentrate in do not share much in common at face value.

Demand-side explanations for queer men's occupational segregation posit that factors such as employment discrimination, differences in human capital, and implicit biases towards queer men on the part of the employer drive occupational segregation (Kaufman 2002; Tilcsik, Anteby and Knight 2015). These explanations are not without merit, as past work demonstrates pervasive discrimination against openly queer men on the labor market, with little variation by industry or occupation (Drydakis 2009; Tilscik 2011). For queer men, sexuality can serve as a basis for discrimination in the workforce (Waite and Denier 2015; Cech and Rothwell 2020). For example, queer men encounter stereotypes and biases surrounding their competence, ability, authority, and professionalism both in the labor market and once in the workforce (Waite and Denier 2015; Cech and Rothwell 2020). These biases, in part, stem from ideas and stereotypes surrounding queer sexuality and masculinity as well as queer men's assumed inability to fit the "ideal worker" model in a labor force that largely privileges hegemonic masculinity and all qualities that are associated with it, especially in industries where this ideal worker may be explicitly masculine and straight (Waite and Denier 2015). Yet, as noted by Tilcsik, Anteby and Knight (2015), though discrimination may be one mechanism underlying occupational segregation along the lines of sexuality, it likely takes a more indirect than direct role.

Taking a multi-level approach, supply-side explanations posit that queer social actors may form different work-related aspirations and preferences than non-queer social actors (Baumle, Compton and Poston 2009; Tilcsik, Anteby and Knight 2015). Scholars in this camp argue that queer men are drawn to certain occupations, though explanations for *why* remain varied. One perspective argues that queer men are drawn to gender-atypical professions in which the "ideal worker" is not masculine and that are mostly occupied by women, such as artistic and service professions (Baumle, Compton, and Poston 2009; Ueno, Roach and Pena-Talamantes 2013). Yet, not all occupations that queer men are concentrated in are majority-women, and past work has argued that sex-typing explanations leave a great deal of variation unexplained (Tilscik, Anteby and Knight 2015).

Offering a competing explanation, Tilcsik and colleagues (2015) argue that queer individuals past experiences (growing up, navigating school, etc.) allow or force them to develop different abilities and career-related preferences than their non-queer counterparts. Conceptualizing sexuality as a form of "concealable stigma," the authors argue that queer workers will concentrate in occupations that allow for task independence (so that they will not have to worry about disclosure or discrimination) and that privilege social perceptiveness (which queer individuals develop a talent for, due to regularly having to ascertain the threat associated with their sexuality in each new situation/context). This work has been central in beginning to understand the mechanisms behind occupational segregation along the lines of sexuality, and it importantly highlights both the role of past experiences in shaping career decisions and the more innocuous role that discrimination may play in shaping career decisions for those individuals with stigmatizing, yet not readily visible, identities.

Yet, this explanation also leaves a great deal of within-category variation unexplained. Though past experiences may shape career-related decisions for queer men, there is great diversity in within-category experience (Hill-Collins 1990; Somers 1994; Moon 2012, Turner 2019). As noted by Somers (1994), “there is no reason to believe/assume a priori that people with similar attributes will share common experiences of social life, let alone be moved to common forms and meanings of social action, unless they share narrative identities and relational settings” (pp. 635). The centrality that sexuality takes in structuring the lives and career-related decisions of queer men is a largely empirical question. Past work has highlighted the vast diversity among queer men, both in terms of experiences (Green 2008; Hunter 2010; Green 2011) and the extent to which they feel it is a central to their self-conception (Hunter 2010). Further, past explanations for queer men’s occupational segregation take up what Collins and Blige (2016) refer to as monocategorical approaches, privileging sexuality while leaving other axes of division, such as race or class, largely unaccounted for. Recent work critiques such approaches to understanding the organization of social life and argues for more intersectional and comprehensive approaches (Collins and Bilge 2016; Feinstein 2017; Hamilton et al. 2020). As Collins and Bilge argue, “When it comes to social inequality, people’s lives and the organization of power in a given society are best understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other" (p. 2).

Queer men of color, for example, may articulate that their sexuality is less a part of their self-conception than their racial identity, which they believe serves as a more salient basis for differential treatment and discrimination (Green 2008; Hunter 2010; Green 2011). Following this, it may be that for queer men of color, their sexuality took on little significance in structuring their career decisions because they did not view it as a central component of who they are or as a primary frame through which they viewed and moved throughout the social world. Further, the experiences of queer men, both in the world of work and growing up, are likely heavily influenced by their gender presentation and performances. One such reason that queer men are disadvantaged in the labor market is because their sexuality precludes them from being able to display or perform hegemonic masculinity (Waite and Denier 2015). Past work has argued that these "failed displays of hegemonic masculinity" that queer men experience growing up likely impact their gender-atypical career-related choices (Waite and Denier 2015, p. 569). Yet, there is great variation in gender presentation and performance among queer-identifying men, begging the question of how queer men who may more properly perform hegemonic masculinity make their career decisions and what role their sexuality takes on in this process.

Identities can, however, take on a meaningful and constraining character in structuring the decisions that people make (Correll 2001; Correll 2004; Charles and Bradley 2009; Owens, Robinson and Smith-Lovin 2010; Cech et al. 2011; Carter 2013; Cech 2013). Identities can become especially salient or constraining when they become central to our self-conception (Cech 2013). Given that our career decisions are seen, in large part, as expressions of who we *are*, these decisions are one such mechanism undergirding the reproduction of occupational segregation (Correll 2001; Charles and Bradley 2009; Cech 2013). For example, past work examining occupational sex segregation finds that gendered self-conceptions foster differential career decisions between men and women, helping to reproduce occupational sex segregation in the aggregate (Correll 2004; Cech 2013). Thus, identities mold decisions when they become core components of our self-conception. These self-conceptions, however, are fostered by *experiences* that activate our identities or imbue our identities with meaning (Somers 1994; Frye 2012; Carter 2013). In the aggregate, shared experiences guide action and reinforce more macro patterns, such as occupational segregation, by shaping our values and aspirations (Shore 1998; Frye 2012).

Though shared experiences may shape decisions and aggregate patterns, the extent to which queer men share sets of past experiences and the role this takes in fostering career-related decisions is mostly an empirical question. As noted by Somers (1994), "…a social identity or categorical approach presumes internally stable concepts, such that under normal conditions entities within that category will act uniformly and predictably…" (p. 621). Self-conceptions and actions are not necessarily tied to the categories to which we belong (Somers 1994). Without being understood relationally, identities lose their meaning (Somers 1994). Thus, to understand the way in which sexuality may influence career decisions, it is necessary to understand the symbolic significance queer men give to their sexuality.

As Tilcsik and colleagues (2015) note, we still lack an understanding of how queer men choose occupations and careers. This chapter asks to what extent do queer men believe their career decisions were influenced by their sexuality? Instead of assuming that sexuality does influence career-related choices for queer men, this project leaves open the possibility that queer men may not view their sexuality as being at all significant. Further, in not assuming that sexuality necessarily shapes career decisions of queer men, this project can examine what differentiates those that note it having been central to their career decisions and those that report it having taken on little to no significance.

In this chapter, I argue that in the career narratives of queer men in my sample, their sexuality was believed to have influenced their career decisions when (A) they viewed their sexuality as a meaningful form of difference from straight men, and (B) they saw their sexuality as a core component of their self-understanding. These boundaries were brightened by past experiences, often with straight men during junior high and high school, that led queer men to understand that their sexuality constituted a meaningful form of difference. I find differences along racial lines, with queer men of color (and specifically queer Black men) often reporting their career decisions not having been shaped by their sexuality, largely because they saw their racial identity as the more meaningful axis of difference and as the primary frame through which they made their career decisions.

This chapter focuses on the narratives queer men in my sample draw on to discuss their career-related decisions. I attend to the ways in which these men describe their selection of a college major, their selection of an industry/occupation after leaving college, and how they ended up in their current occupation/industry. I allowed respondents to walk me through their process and highlight for me the factors that were most important in shaping these decisions, allowing for the possibility that their sexuality played no role in their career-related decisions. If a respondent did not articulate that their sexuality shaped their career-related decisions, I would pose a follow-up question, asking if any of their decisions had been impacted by their sexuality or experiences as a queer man. Using a narrative approach allows us to explicate the different criteria that queer men use to make sense of their career decisions, allowing for an empirical investigation of whether and for whom sexuality takes on a central role in the way these men make sense of their career-related decisions. This chapter centers on retrospective accounts that respondents offer to make sense of their career decisions. The goal of this chapter is thus not to tease out the exact motivations that drove their decisions or behaviors when they were making these decisions. Rather, this chapter seeks to understand how these men make sense of their career decisions. The implications of using retrospective narratives will be elaborated on further in the discussion section.

I arrange this chapter along the lines of boundary brightness, meaning that I differentiate between those respondents for whom their sexuality, either directly or indirectly, did shape their career decisions (the Bright Boundaries group, which encompasses those in the Consistently Bright and Dimmed Boundaries groups) and those who articulate that their sexuality in no way shaped their career-related decisions (the Dim Boundaries group, which encompasses those in the Brightened Boundaries and Never Bright groups). These 2 groups—the Bright and Dim Boundaries, are used for the sake of this chapter to denote the significance respondents gave to their sexuality when discussing their career decisions, and are analytically distinct from the "Brightened Boundaries" and "Dimmed Boundaries" groups, which are meant to capture the significance respondents gave to their sexuality throughout their career narratives.

The Bright Boundaries

33 men in my sample fell into the "Bright Boundaries" category in terms of choosing their career. These respondents believed that their career-related decisions were impacted by their sexuality. Most often, this started with their college major decision and followed through to their decisions surrounding what industry to enter and where to work. As I will elaborate below, respondents came to understand their sexuality as being both consequential and central to their

self-understanding because past experiences led them to believe that their sexuality made them sufficiently different from straight men and that this difference can serve as a source of stigma. I will argue that queer men’s self-conceptions do shape their career-related decisions and that these self-conceptions vary widely—with sexuality taking a more central role in some than others—working to shape respondents’ career decisions in different ways.

Those in the “Bright boundary” category fall into two groups: those who believe their sexuality had a direct impact on their career decisions and those who believe that it had an indirect effect on their career decisions. Though both groups believe that their career-related decisions were shaped by their sexuality, they noted it did so in different ways. Those who believe it had a direct impact articulated making a career out of their sexuality by going into queer-related or queer-focused work. These respondents noted making their career decisions on the basis of their sexuality and pursued careers directly related to it. Those who believe their sexuality had an indirect impact believe that their sexuality influenced their career decisions in more innocuous ways, articulating that their past experiences related to their sexuality led them into certain passions or interests that eventually became their career or that they chose their career because they believed that it would offset the stigma attached to their sexuality. These respondents did not articulate their sexuality as the primary basis by which they made their career decisions or formed career aspirations; instead, their sexuality and prior experiences relating to it shaped their passions or interests. Unlike those who believed their sexuality had a direct impact, those who believed it had an indirect impact did not note choosing a career specifically because they were queer but that their sexuality shaped their lived experience in such a way that their interests and/or passions were, at least in part, also shaped by it.

A Direct Impact

Out of the 33 men in my sample who belonged to the "Bright" group, only 5 conveyed their sexuality having a direct impact on their career-related decisions. As noted above, these respondents believe that their career-related decisions were wholly influenced by their sexuality. Men in this group were primarily concentrated in occupations that were related to LGBTQ+ issues, including community organizing, queer-related research, or social work with an explicit focus on queer populations. Whereas some men in other groups articulated forming their career aspirations during junior high and high school, men in this group noted "coming in" to their career aspirations in college, often after taking a class that spoke to their experiences as a queer man or a queer man of color. For example, when asked about what he wanted to have as a career when he was in college, Rohan (26, South Asian, Social Worker), who now works as a social worker focused on helping queer populations noted his career plans changing after taking an English class in college that centered on race and sexuality and was taught by a queer Black woman:

> That probably was one of the most formative classes I've ever taken in my life. I've never read so much queer literature, never read so much Black radicalism, yada yada yada. It was like oh. It was a really big light bulb switch, it allowed me to get really comfortable with my sexuality. Allowed me to be really comfortable with my race, allowed me to be really comfortable with my own identity. Then I was like, oh I want to do something in this.

Rohan noted that he was drawn to his line of work due to a class that helped him make sense of his own lived experience as a queer person of color. For him, his identities were inextricably tied to his chosen career path.

Respondents in this group noted using their college courses and major as a mechanism of coming into and making sense of their own sexuality, allowing them to understand their own experiences and the larger systems of inequality that shaped them. All 5 respondents in this category noted wanting to "give back" to their communities, be it sexual or racial. Rohan articulates this in the exchange below:

> Rohan: I basically wanted to do, I wanted to fast track people away from the situation I had been through.
> Billy: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
> Rohan: Of racism, homophobia, specifically working with [members of these groups] So that they didn't have to experience all that bullshit…

From the above account, we see that Rohan both encountered differential treatment on the basis of his race and sexuality and that these experiences served as the basis for his career aspirations. Similarly, in explaining his decision to go into community organizing, Benjamin (46, Hispanic, Community Organizer) expressed feeling a need to help queer men of color:

> Benjamin: Around that time there was this second wave of AIDS that happened in communities of color, especially with young men and young men of color specifically. They needed folks that looked like the population. I had a lot of offers at that point.
> Billy: Why did you choose to go into that line of work?
> Benjamin: Cause it was working with community. It was in health and I could be an advocate not only in that area but in other areas. I was sitting on boards. I was collaborating with other immigrant groups.

The narratives from Rohan and Benjamin highlight that for these men, their identities were central in shaping their career decisions. Men who believed their sexuality had a direct impact on their career-related decisions expressed a strong sense of wanting to give back to queer populations and sometimes queer populations of color. But what fostered this drive to make a career out of issues pertaining to queer populations? All 5 men in this group noted that their career aspirations were formed by their past experiences, mostly with discrimination and homophobia. All respondents in this group reported encountering homophobia growing up and expressed that these experiences of feeling different or ostracized molded their career aspirations. Matthew (Hispanic, 25, PhD student), who now works in queer-related public health research and is studying to become a psychologist, talked about how his experiences growing up impacted his aspirations:

> Billy: And this might seem obvious, but why is it important for you to help LGBT youth in the context in which you will?
> Matthew: Just because growing up that way and having the struggle that I had. Not really having anyone in my corner, especially a medical or psychological professional I feel like can be really hurtful for a lot of people. I feel like I managed it well and I bounced back but a lot of people don't. That's either a lot of make it or break it, especially for teens. And if you could just be a person who could just provide a little bit of empathy and a little bit of comfort to a person who is going through literal hell then that's fine.

Accounts such as the one provided from Matthew, along with other men who believed their sexuality had a direct impact, demonstrate that their past experiences with stigmatization or unequal treatment on the basis of their sexual and sometimes racial identity were incredibly formative with regards to their career aspirations. These past experiences led them to believe that their sexuality was a consequential and often disadvantageous axis of difference. Not only did they believe that their sexuality took on significance but they also conveyed an identification with this identity, demonstrated in their connection with those facing similar injustices that they had. They expressed a desire to "give back" to what they believed was their community, in hopes of ameliorating some injustice or making things easier for those currently facing them.

An Indirect Impact

28 of the 33 respondents in the "Bright" category believed that their sexuality had an indirect impact on their career-related decisions. Men in this group reported that their sexuality was indeed formative but in less overt ways than for those who believed it had a direct impact. They conveyed that their experiences (most often in junior high and high school) with homophobia or their inability to properly display hegemonic masculinity fostered their interests, which eventually led them into their current career. These passions, however, were wide-

ranging—including theatre, dance, psychology, programing, etc. What men in this group have in common is that past experiences led them to believe they were different from straight men, and this difference led them to seek out spaces and interests that helped them affirm or make sense of their sexuality or to mitigate the stigma surrounding their sexuality. While most men in this group (20) believed that their sexuality helped shape their interests, a smaller number of men (4) noted that they chose their career as a way of compensating for the stigma attached to their sexuality, often selecting more masculine and high-status occupations.

Similarly to those who believed their sexuality had a direct impact on their career-related decisions, most men in this group reported experiencing bullying and homophobia growing up, often from straight men. In detailing his experiences with bullying and homophobia growing up, Jesse (24, white, Photographer):

> It was something that definitely started in elementary school too. It's the same thing, people telling me I was a fag before I even knew what that word was. When people are like how do you know you're or, "When did you know you were gay?" I was like, "Honestly, it's because people were telling me that I was." I didn't even like think about it until in elementary school. People were like, "You're a fag." I was like, "What is that? I don't know what that is."

Jesse notes above that he experienced homophobia and stigmatization from others beginning at an early age. Similarly, Samuel (white, 22, Theatre) details his experiences with bullying in junior high and high school due to his gender presentation:

> Billy: What was the bullying about?
> Samuel: I'm a very effeminate person, like I think I have more "feminine" mannerisms and the way I speak is kind of ... I speak in the stereo- Or, I used to. I've worked on it more since then, because I want to be an actor. But I think I used to speak in a very stereotypical gay way. So, yeah. I think it was just the way I acted. And I was one of those people, like one of those gay guys in middle school that never got a girlfriend so that way they could at least pretend like they were straight. I would just tell people I was straight, so I had a very weak front. I didn't have like, "This is my girlfriend." I was just like, "No, I am. And you can take my word for it."

Here, Samuel notes that his more feminine gender presentation both made others perceive him as queer and also served as the basis for his experiences with bullying and stigmatization. Echoing many other respondents in the "Bright" group, these past experiences with homophobia led him to be less comfortable with straight men:

> [I] felt safer around girls. And I think that's purely because that's what I was used to. I think in high school, maybe, it was like I was used to straight guys being mean to me, so that was another reason.

In response to encountering homophobia from straight boys growing up, some men in my sample (specifically those in theatre and arts) sought out "safe spaces" that allowed them to more freely express themselves and develop a positive point of view on their sexuality. Take, for example, Terry (Black/white, 26, Theatre/Performer) who noted feeling as though theatre and performing gave him a space to be himself:

> Well, it's a lot easier performing. It's a stereotype that all men in musical theater and especially dance, are gay. But it's also largely tends to be the truth. So, it's a lot more comfortable for me. I'm around people that like what I like, honestly. But it is a culture with it. And I can talk more openly and freely. And be myself.

Terry notes that theatre offered him a space where he felt comfortable, largely because being queer is not something that is stigmatized in that space. Not only could these safe spaces offer queer men the space to freely express themselves, but they also often allowed them to get positive reinforcement from their peers outside of these spaces. As Terry articulates,

> I felt like I could trust myself to perform and in performing I found my comfort. That was the first time I liked being seen. And just from the first performance and hearing people cheer, and celebrate it, and how good it felt to do it. I kind of got hooked right away.

When asked what about it felt good, he noted:

> I don't know, I think that... it just felt cool to feel cool. And so, in all the ways that I felt weird before, I didn't because people were drawn to me on stage. And so, it kind of like put me in a better sort of middle ground. That interestingly enough, I've found most of left a mark. Because when I've gone back home, and

> if I’ve gone out to get a drink with a friend that’s in the area. Multiple times I’ve run into people from high school that I didn’t speak to in high school at all. That remember me and have been following my dance career, and my path, and admiring what I’m doing now. So, it’s like yeah, it helped me more than I expected it to.

In the account above, Terry notes going into theatre and dance because it both provided him with a space to feel open and comfortable as well as gave him an outlet to be seen and appreciated by others. These narratives—which echoed almost all other respondents in this sample who pursued a career in the performing arts—illustrates the ways in which certain spheres helped to mitigate the stigma or difference queer men felt was associated with their sexuality growing up. For these men, their experiences with bullying or homophobia, most often perpetrated by straight men, led them into spaces where they felt they could be affirmed and accepted, working to cultivate their passions, which eventually became what they pursued as careers.

Though all men who believed their sexuality to have an indirect impact on their career-related decisions expressed feeling dissimilar from straight men growing up and that these feelings of difference fostered their passions, these passions varied widely. Not all men in this group, for example, developed a passion for the performing arts. Others developed a passion for academics and particular fields of study. Noting both physical and verbal harassment from straight men in junior and high school, Martin (30, Hispanic, Computer Programmer) noted that his advanced placement courses offered him a safe space:

> It wasn’t like super liberal and rainbow flags everywhere, what I meant was that everyone there, all of the students, were extremely liberal…and when we read, we read other cultures and stuff like that, and a lot of the things we read about. For example, we read a Senegalese author…basically the tone was homophobia, and homophobia in Africa. And like Ghanaian genocide and stuff like that. So these were things that we regularly talked about and were part of the discourse. And so it wasn't like, maybe it wasn’t part of the personal teacher’s politics, but because of the environment, it would be very weird to talk about genocide and then literally call someone a fag.

Martin articulates that the more advanced curriculum and exposure to progressive texts within these advanced courses created an atmosphere where queerness would likely not serve as a basis for stigmatization. Noting the lack of gay friends and role models, Martin turned to computers and the internet for affirmation regarding his sexuality, noting that "ever since I was little, I was always obsessed with computers. I learned how to be gay from the computer, on the Internet." He credits his interest in his emerging sexuality with his passion for and eventual career in programing, as articulated below:

> When you encounter a bug or some sort of flaw in a system, you often have to think outside of the box, in a way that's very precise. But that other people couldn't figure out. And you have to know how to look at things in a different way. That's what I often found I do over, honestly, straight people. Straight people are really good at getting the job done. But if they encounter a slight obfuscation or error on an automatic test that's running, or anything like that, I'm often the person at work that people ask to come in. I'm like, "Okay, what about this? What if I try this? What if I looked at it like this, or did this." And I think that becomes, because you're used to searching for things as a queer person, constantly, for everything from how to have sex, to how to meet people, to what to wear, what do these words mean? What does being queer mean? What is LGBQIA stand for? What is my history? How did this happen? *Why is everyone so mean to us*?" All of these things, you're always searching for things. You're always trying to look at things in a different way, than yourself. So it's very easy to then do that skill at work, in my opinion.

In the narrative above, Martin credits his sexuality with fostering his passion for computer programing, noting that his experiences growing up queer forced him to turn toward computers to make sense of his sexuality and also allowed him to think creatively about problems, which he notes having made him a more successful programmer than his straight-identifying counterparts. These accounts demonstrate that although queer men's experiences with homophobia and stigmatization help mold their passions and career aspirations, they do so in diverse ways. What links the experiences of the men who believed their sexuality to have an indirect impact on their career-related decisions is that the feelings of difference surrounding their sexuality led them to seek out spaces and subjects that helped affirm their sexuality and/or curtail the "risk” associated with it.

A smaller subset of men who believed their sexuality had an indirect impact on their career-related decisions (4) noted that their sexuality did play a central role in their career-related decisions, in that they viewed their career choice as a way to compensate for the perceived stigma surrounding their sexuality. These men worked in masculine-typed and high-status occupations (such as engineering, finance, and consulting), which they believed, when they were selecting a career, would either help them to better be able to pass as straight (because they entered into a masculine industry) or would lessen some of the stigma surrounding their sexuality (because they were working in an impressive, high-status occupation). Take for example Tristan (white, 25, consulting), a consultant that notes that queer men often feel a need to compensate for their sexuality and believes that his job offers him a way to do that:

> You look at these ripped, muscle daddies who are like 29 or 30, or whatever. Obviously, it’s like their body is their primer for how they go about the world, because it’s a way for them to compensate. Of course, duh. For me, it’s the job. It’s a way for me to compensate…it feels great to say that I have a job in a competitive industry that I worked hard for.

Above, Tristan notes that his job in the competitive consulting industry affords him status, allowing him to compensate for being queer. When asked how this all related to his queer identity, he replied:

> So, if somebody work at an investment bank, there’s nothing fun about working a 90 hour work week. Why do people do it? It’s because of the money, duh. So, gays that work in finance, they do it because, sure, they might be interested in money, and numbers, but at the end of the day, it’s that big, fat paycheck that they get, because that way, it’s sort of an external validation of: “Hey, look at me. I’m smart. I’m successful. Even though I’m gay, I can do this.” Do you know what I mean?

Tristan articulates above that succeeding in competitive and lucrative professions affords queer men the ability to impress others and offset the stigma associated with their sexuality, which was echoed in his statement “Even though I’m gay, I can do this.” The account above speaks to the multitude of ways that sexuality can shape career aspirations and decisions.

Sexuality and Self-Understandings: Connecting the Direct and Indirect Impacts

Though the process by which their sexuality molded their career decisions differ, respondents who believe that their career-related decisions were either directly or indirectly shaped by their sexuality all expressed in their career narratives that their career decisions were impacted by their sexuality. What do the narratives from those in the “Bright Boundaries” group have in common? Two central themes run through their narratives: (A) past experiences helped make their sexuality a central component of their self-understanding, and (B) they understood their sexuality as a *meaningful* difference in relation to straight-identifying men. Using the language of boundaries, they both understood there to be a boundary between queer and straight men and perceived this boundary to be consequential or “bright.” Take, for example, an anecdote from Jesse (24, white, Photographer), when asked why his sexuality takes on a central role in his self-understanding:

> [My sexuality] was one of the biggest challenges growing up. It is something that helps me relate to other people. It’s something that allows me to have conversations that I wouldn’t necessarily have any idea before. It’s kind of [like discussing] race. It’s like if you are white, you don't have too much of like a background knowledge to really be a part of that conversation…when you’re having a conversation about sexuality and you have been a called faggot you're whole life and it's something that has been like the best and worst part about you at some point in your life, like it’s just something that ... Do you kind of see where I’m going with this?

Echoing many others, this narrative highlights the ways in which, for men in the “Bright” group, negative experiences surrounding their sexuality help to make it a core aspect of their self-conception. These bright boundaries surrounding their sexuality influence career decisions in meaningful ways—either by shaping their interests and the spaces they feel they act authentically in or by motivating them to select into careers that would allow them to give back and help other members of the queer "community." Connecting the centrality of sexuality in his self-understanding and the way in which he navigates the world, Samuel (white, 22, Theatre) stated:

> There are people who are like, "I'm gay, but I'm also so much else. It's not a big part of my identity." I disagree highly. I think it affects the way you think about everything. I think the minute you are a straight, white, cis male, any part of that formula of being a male, straight, white, cis male. The minute any part of that formula is removed, I think it immediately affects the way you think. 'Cause they don't, straight white cis men don't think about any of those factors when they are thinking about their opinions…and I think just being gay, it just affects how ... the way I think about life, how I form opinions, the way I relate to my friends of color.

For Samuel, his experiences as queer and the symbolic significance attributed to his sexuality made it so that his sexuality was central to his self-conception and as a primary frame through which he viewed the social world. Similarly, Sebastian (Hispanic, 28, PhD student) noted his sexuality also being central to his self-conception:

> I guess some people could argue that they are more than their sexuality. I would argue that you can't really separate who you are as a person from your sexuality because then that goes down to your personal politics and your morals and values. Everything that could grant me the life I have right now is because of people like me who have fought before me for my rights. And so I'm always very aware of that in my mind. The ability that I have to walk down the street and kiss a man right there is because of people, who are very different than me, but they fought for my rights. I take much pride in being gay. I never let it slide anywhere, I want people to know I'm gay.

Sebastian notes his sexuality as being central to who he is as a person and as even shaping his morals and values—remarking that this centrality stems from the systematic and historical discrimination that queer people have faced. In connecting the centrality of his sexuality to his career-related decisions, Walter (white 25, Customer Support Specialist at a Tech company) states:

> Understanding difference and experiencing difference gives you a view and a perspective on social issues, just like a lot of activists who have a minority class about them. They will cite that identity and that experience as a driver in motivation for why they're so motivated to whatever cause they're working on.

Importantly, Walter notes that his identity took on significance *relationally*, serving as a meaningful form of difference, and that these experiences with "difference" shaped his worldview and subsequent motivations.

Those in the "Bright" group all highlighted in their career narratives that their sexuality meaningfully shaped their career aspirations and decisions, largely because they saw it as a consequential form of difference and central aspect of who they are. But who articulates that their sexuality played no role in shaping their career aspirations or decisions, and why? Next, I turn to those in the "Dim" group to explore the career narratives of men who articulate their sexuality playing no role in their career decisions.

The Dim Boundaries

34 men in my sample fell into the "Dim Boundaries" category, articulating that their sexuality in no way impacted their college major or career-related decisions and more frequently were concentrated in masculine-typed occupations. Men in the "Dim boundaries" group highlighted other concerns or factors that shaped these decisions, including money, stability, status, and sometimes passion. Though all men in this group identify as queer, and few expressed any discomfort identifying with a label, they felt their sexuality was separate from their careers and career aspirations. What differentiated those in the "Dim Boundaries" group from those in the "Bright Boundaries", and why did their sexuality take on different meanings in their career decisions? Respondents in the "Dim Boundaries" group did not see their sexuality as a core

component of who they are or were at the time that they were making these career-related decisions and/or did not see their sexuality as a potentially consequential source of stigma. This belief allowed men to come into their careers without much, if any, regard to their sexuality. As will be elaborated below, many men in this group noted not having much experience with homophobia, which allowed them to perceive the symbolic boundary surrounding their sexuality as being less bright than those in the "Bright" group.

Self-Conceptions and Career Decisions

Most men noted that their sexuality was not a defining aspect of their self-understanding, especially when they were making decisions about what to study and what careers to pursue. These respondents regularly articulated that their sexuality was but one aspect of who they were and are, not a frame through which they made decisions. This narrative was often echoed among the white, (upper) middle class men in the "Dim boundaries" group, who asserted that their sexuality did not define who they were and was kept separate from their career aspirations and decisions. Similarly, Alan (white, 26, Finance/Tech), when asked if he believes his career decisions were shaped by his experiences as a queer man, noted that his career decisions were disentangled from his sexuality largely because that was not an aspect of his self-understanding that he wanted to be central:

> Actually no, not at all. Again, that's the other thing. It's just so funny I'm like "oh yeah I'm also part of the queer, I'm also that." That was never the motive for literally any of my decisions in my life, major decisions of course like moving and doing this, and coming to New York. That was never the motive. You know, when I did move to the city or I went to the Pride Parade before I moved there in high school because I was part of friend groups that were queer and did that and I was like, "Okay cool, that's something cool that I could do," so we did it and it was just kind of imposed on me, but hey you have to be careful because there's all these issues with that community, drugs and STDs and all that stuff. But that was never a concern of mine, because that's not something I sought out. I never sought out that type of identity or that type of atmosphere all the time, that wasn't the reason or purpose for my decisions, you know?

As a follow-up, I asked him if he believed that sexuality plays a role in the career decisions of most queer men, and he believed that it likely does for most but differentiated himself in stating:

> Yeah, I think so. I kind of guess this goes back to what I was saying with how gay men maybe gravitate and people who are queer gravitate towards those groups of people and they gravitate to that idea that that is their only idea. That they need to fulfill this gay requirement for them. "I am gay, therefore I'm going to be doing this." I think that should be the *wrong* approach, *because there's more to somebody than their sexual orientation.* I don't know if that's a healthy way of thinking about it or if it's a healthier way to think, "I am my sexual orientation," I'm not quite sure, it's whatever works for whoever, I can't impose anything on that. I think yeah, gay men maybe do gravitate more towards careers that fill that identity for them.

Alan's account demonstrates that his sexuality did not shape his career-related decisions largely because he understands his sexuality as being only one, and not a central, component of his self-understanding. Similar to other white men in the "Dim Boundaries" group, he believes that it would be a bad decision to use his sexuality as a frame through which to make decisions. The reasons behind the differential centrality that respondents in the "Dim Boundaries" and "Bright Boundaries" groups attributed to their sexuality will be elaborated on below, but for those in the "Dim Boundaries" group, the belief that one's sexuality should not be a frame through which decisions are made allowed them to come into their passions, interests, and careers without regard for the symbolic meaning surrounding their sexuality.

Not all respondents in the "Dim Boundaries" group, however, disregarded identity-related concerns in regard to their career-related decisions. (N=15) men in my sample believed their sexuality played no role in shaping their career decisions largely because they perceived their other devalued identity characteristics, such as their race or social class, playing a more central role in influencing these decisions. Sheldon (25, Black, Higher Education

Administration) elaborated on the ways in which his racial identity took precedent over his sexuality in shaping his career decisions:

> Billy: Would you say that in any way your queer identity was linked to your career aspirations?
> Sheldon: Not in a vacuum. Only with my racial identity.
> Billy: What do you mean by that?
> Sheldon: Yeah, I never ... I've heard many people say ... Many of my friends have said this. They would always identify as Black [before they] identify as queer. I would cosign that for myself. It's so odd. I don't see ... Yeah, I don't know. I definitely cannot see my queerness outside of my Blackness at all, and so I don't even know. Yeah, queerness in and of itself was not thought about in my career aspirations or whatever. It was not thought about as a part of that.

When asked if he believes that, for queer men, the centrality of sexuality in shaping career decisions varies along racial lines, he noted:

> I'm sure it does vary among racial lines because from what I said earlier, I think most ... I'll speak for Black people, or as a Black person. I think people probably think about their Blackness first as opposed to their queerness. When they're making decisions about industries or what jobs to go into or whatever else, I'm sure that Blackness is probably more of a thing than their queerness. I can't say that non-Black people think about that in that way. They may lead with queerness and not think about race essentially at all. They may be motivated by different things…this is anecdotal, but I definitely think that being queer and white just means something different than being queer and Black obviously, and what it means to be queer and white ... I think because, in my experience, white people experience queerness so much more strongly than Black people. Again, there's not this other identity to lean on. There's not this Black and queer. It's like, I'm white, and now I'm also queer. I think that because ... I'll put it this way. Similar to how Black people think so deeply about race and think about their life and decisions, for white queer men, that could be the same analog where their queerness means so, so, so much that they think about that deeply in their career decisions or their life decisions in the same way that people of color think about their race in those same decisions.

Sheldon notes that his Black identity was more central in shaping his lived experience, and thus, it was also more central in shaping his career decisions. Central to his account was the notion that queerness, and the centrality it takes on in the self-conceptions of queer men, is deeply racialized—noting that it may be more central for queer white men because it is their primary axes of difference, whereas queer Black men understand their race as being most visible and as the primary lens through which they experience the social world. For many queer men of color in my sample, it was not that sexuality took on no significance for them, rather, they saw their racial identity as being *more* of a salient and consequential identity characteristic. Queer men of color in the "Dim Boundaries" group differ from the white men in this group in that they did feel as though their career decisions were influenced by their experiences with marginalization and stigmatization, but mostly from their experiences as a person of color, and not necessarily from their experiences as a queer man. This was echoed by Stanley (26, Black, STEM), who detailed what motivated him to leave his STEM job and pursue a graduate degree in photography:

> I mean just creating a space for Black and brown people for the most part to talk about their experiences and their issues, which I think is what got me into grad school. But yeah, I created a whole project where these are things that we talk about just because I think, hey, we definitely need to be talking about these things and even if it's not to necessarily change the way that we are treated by white people or just other people in the community. For someone to see that their experience is not invalid, that they're not the only one that feels this way.

Stanley notes the centrality of racism and his experience as a Black man in shaping his career aspirations and decisions. These narratives demonstrate the centrality that race takes in the lives of many of the queer men of color in the "Dim Boundaries" group, making it a primary frame through which they developed passions and made career-related decisions. Though most of these men noted that their queerness took on a larger significance or salience within their racial community, their racial identity more impactfully shaped their experiences in the social world and was often a catalyst in shaping their career-related decisions, either overtly or indirectly[6].

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[6] Though most did, not all queer men of color fell into the "Dim Boundaries" group. For example, 2 of the 12 Black men in my sample did not believe their racial identity shaped their career decisions.

For a few respondents, other identity characteristics, such as class and religious identity, took on a central significance in their career decisions. Similar to queer men of color in the "Dim Boundaries" group, they did not see their sexuality as mattering for their career decisions because their experiences with growing up poor or growing up deeply religious served as primary motivators.

Not A Source of Disadvantage

More commonly, especially among white men respondents who did not see their sexuality having an impact on their career decisions reported that they did not believe their sexuality was a source of stigma. This was largely due to the fact that they had little to no experience with homophobia growing up, most often reporting positive high school experiences. For example, Ryan (white, 22, Finance) reported a somewhat seamless coming out process, even after coming out in 9th grade:

> Billy: Did you ever experience any kind of bullying? I imagine in ninth grade for most people it wouldn't be an easy situation.
> Ryan: No.
> Billy: No, really?
> Ryan: No I did not experience anything. I think the thing with that, I kind of question that in retrospect because I was considered ... everyone has these horror stories, whether it be with their family, with their friends, with their school, with their immediate environment. I think it was mainly because the school in the area was very liberal, it was very diverse.

Ryan notes that not only did he not experience bullying on the basis of his sexuality but that he also understands that this differs from the experiences of most other queer men. Many respondents also articulated an ability to navigate masculine spaces and noted participating in sports in high school or college and Greek life in college. Further, some men in this group explicitly noted having more masculine self-conceptions, especially in relation to other queer men. For example, Bob (29, white, Physical Therapist) believed that he presents as more masculine than other queer men might—fostered by playing numerous sports throughout high school and college. He believed that this allowed him to feel comfortable in spaces comprised of mostly straight-identifying men with ease:

> Bob: I guess I never think of a situation where being surrounded by a bunch of straight men would ever hinder my comfortableness…
> Interviewer: Why not?
> Bob: I guess from previous experiences? I've [hung out] with a lot of straight men. I've had a very easygoing coming out, being who I am, gay story.

The lack of experiences with homophobia, especially from their peers, stood in stark contrast to respondents in the "Bright Boundaries" group. Whereas those in the "Bright Boundaries" group were acutely aware that their sexuality did and could serve as a basis for differential treatment, men in the "Dim boundaries" group endorsed more meritocratic worldviews, especially with regard to the world of work—articulating that their sexuality would not matter so long as they exceled in their chosen field. When asked if he ever thought his sexuality could serve as the basis for discrimination in the world of work, Jason (32, Hispanic, Finance) stated he did not, because "If I'm good at my job, it shouldn't matter if I'm gay or straight so I don't ... I mean, I never thought it was something that was important to lead with." Similarly, Ryan assumed that sexuality would be protected in any organization he would work for, noting "I didn't realize there would be. I just assume everything has protections, that's just my general knowledge."

White, (upper) middle class queer men in the "Dim Boundaries" group had difficulty conveying what differentiated them from queer men whose career aspirations and decisions were shaped by their sexuality. Those in the "Bright Boundaries" group, however, were acutely aware of why certain queer men might be able to view their sexuality as secondary. Samuel (22, white, Performer) notes

> They're always white. I think they're generally the more stereotypically physically attractive ones, the more classic American ones who have great

> metabolisms that I hope to god slow down. And I think they generally come from higher income families…I also think they're more stereotypically straight acting and I don't mean that like they purposely act straight, they ... I think in the way that they probably have lower registered voices. I think being gay has never been something that has physicalized, or no ... they don't have any physical characteristics that someone looks at them like, "Oh, they're gay." I know the way I talk with my hands and the way I talk and the way I just hold myself sometimes, I know I read as gay. I think these are ... that said, they're just men that don't read as gay so *they've never had that ... I think that constant reminder that they are.*

Samuel articulates that those queer men who do not think about their sexuality when making career decisions likely did not face the same stigmatization that many other queer men face, due in large part to their more masculine presentations and ability to not be read as queer. Though not a member of the "Dim Boundaries" group, Samuel captured central themes running throughout the career narratives of those in the "Dim Boundaries" group, namely, their lack of experience with differential treatment on the basis of their sexuality, and more specifically, the lack of homophobia perpetrated by straight men. It may be that the lack of these experiences afforded these men the ability to not see their sexuality as a likely basis for differential treatment or as the primary basis for their self-understanding.

Conclusion

Whether respondents conveyed that they were guided to act in certain ways because of their sexuality was largely centered on the symbolic meaning they attributed to their sexuality or how bright of a symbolic boundary they perceived surrounding their sexuality. Those men who perceived a "Bright" boundary noted their sexuality being either directly or indirectly central in guiding their career-related decisions, whereas those men who did not see this boundary as bright did not believe their sexuality impacted their career decisions in any way. Whether respondents perceived a bright symbolic boundary around their sexuality was predicted on two separate yet interrelated factors: (1) whether they understood their sexuality as a consequential form of difference, and (2) whether they saw their sexuality as a central component of their self-understanding. Respondents expressed that past experiences, or the lack thereof, were formative in determining whether they understood their sexuality as being consequential and a primary frame through which they understood themselves. Identity, then, may overtly shape career decisions for members of particular identity groups, but only insofar as they understand these identities as having meaningful and consequential symbolic significance and see them as a primary frame through which to view both the social world and themselves.

Aligning with past work on identity and career-related decisions (Tilcsik, Anteby and Knight 2015; Waite and Denier 2015), this chapter highlights the centrality of past experiences with homophobia and stigmatization in queer men's career aspirations and decisions. Men in the "Bright Boundaries" group noted feeling as though they were led into their passions and careers through their experiences as a queer man. Though some felt this occurred directly and others indirectly, what united their narratives was an articulation that their experiences with homophobia, stigmatization, and othering made them feel as though their queer identity served as a form of difference that meaningfully impacted the ways in which they understood and moved throughout the social world and that their queer identity was a core aspect of who they *are*.

For those men in the "Dim Boundaries" group, it was not that their sexuality was entirely unimportant to them or the way that they understood themselves. Many men in this group proudly assert themselves as members of the LGBTQ+ "community," contend that much of their leisure time centers around queer-related activities and spaces, and report large networks of queer-identifying friends. What differentiated the narratives of men in the "Dim Boundaries" group form those in the "Bright Boundaries" group was the *meaning* that they attached to their sexuality. The white men in the “Dim Boundaries” group most often did not articulate experiences with homophobia or stigmatization related to their sexuality growing up and expressed far less discomfort than those in the “Bright” group did with navigating heteronormative and masculine spaces. They did not see their sexuality as something that defined them or as a frame through which they made their career decisions. This echoes past work related to boundary formation and modification—the symbolic significance that we attribute to our various identities are shaped by external factors such as discrimination and stigmatization (Lamont 2000; Lamont and Volnar 2002; Okamoto 2003). For men in the “Dim Boundaries” group, then, the lack of experiences with feeling “othered” along the lines of their sexuality led them to attribute a different symbolic significance to their sexuality, most often articulated as one aspect of who they are but not one that defines them or served as a salient basis for disadvantage.

What queer men of color in the “Dim Boundaries” group shared with white men in this group is the belief that their sexuality did not meaningfully guide their career aspirations and decisions. Yet, their reasons behind this belief differed; queer men of color in this group noted that, because of the visibility of their racial identity and the centrality of their racial identity in shaping their lived experience, their sexuality was not a primary frame through which they viewed the social world, especially during the stage of their lives when they were making career decisions. Their past experiences with differential and unequal treatment on the basis of their racial identity growing up led them to see their racial identity as a primary frame through which they understood themselves and became a chief factor motivating their career aspirations and decisions. As will be expanded upon in later chapters, most Black respondents and over half of Hispanic respondents largely did not see their sexuality as something that would serve as a meaningful form of disadvantage in the world of work—both because they believed their racial identity would be more salient and because they believed their sexuality would make them seem more relatable to those in their (predominantly white and middle class) workplaces.

This chapter highlights the diverse ways in which queer men understand the role that their sexuality played in shaping their career-related aspirations and decisions. Though past work has importantly demonstrated patterns of occupational segregation along the lines of sexuality (Baumle, Compton and Poston 2011a ; Tilcsik, Anteby and Knight 2015) and the way that prior experiences with stigmatization due to their sexuality shape talents, aspirations, and decisions (Tilcsik, Anteby and Knight 2015; Waite and Denier 2015), much of this work has relied on quantitative data and has taken a categorical approach to understanding career decisions, leaving unscrutinized within-category variation. By taking a narrative approach, this chapter takes up the question of what role queer men believe their sexuality took on in their career-related decisions as an empirical one, as opposed to assuming categorical stability in the way queer men think of their sexuality and the role it played in their career decisions. This chapter has argued that rather than acting in a uniform way, relationality was central to whether queer men invoked sexuality as being central to their career decisions. The meaning that queer men in this sample attributed to their sexuality was chiefly predicated on whether they understood their sexuality as serving as a form of meaningful difference from others, most often straight-identifying men. This relationality was expressed as a chief mechanism in structuring the career aspirations and decisions of men in the “Bright” group. Yet, as Somers (1994) notes, this relationality should not be assumed, rather, it should operate as an “analytic variable,” as those in the “Dim Boundaries” group, due in large part to a lack of experiences with stigmatization, articulated not feeling as though their sexuality was something that made them sufficiently different in relation to others to meaningfully distinguish their lived experience, allowing them to form career aspirations and decisions external to their sexuality. Relationality, then, was a chief mechanism differentiating the identity formation and career-related decisions of those in the "Bright Boundaries" group from those in the "Dim Boundaries" group.

Lastly, though this chapter was not primarily concerned with the economic consequences of the decisions of queer men, results from this chapter highlight both an area of concern and a potentially fruitful line of inquiry for future research in that those in the "Dim Boundaries" group tended to, on average, aspire to and acquire employment in higher-status and economically advantageous occupations than did those in the "Bright Boundaries" group. Though this project does not have the data to explore this further, it could be that past experiences with homophobia and stigmatization make it less likely for queer men to seek and eventually find employment in economically advantageous occupations that are masculine-typed—indicating that, in addition to shaping the symbolic significance queer men attribute to their sexuality, past experiences with unequal treatment on the basis of sexuality can serve as a mechanism generating queer men's underrepresentation in high status and income occupations.

A potential critique of the argument presented in this chapter is that the use of in-depth interviews and career narratives with queer men who are already employed precludes an ability to get at the actions of these respondents. Further, it could certainly be argued that sexuality could, even for those in the "Dim Boundaries" group, have impacted their career decisions in ways that they may not be conscious of or in ways that they are now disregarding. Both of these points are important—in that interviews are not ideal for getting at actions and motives (Vaisey 2009). This, however, does not challenge the importance of narratives queer men are drawing on to make sense of their career decisions. For example, if the career decisions of men in the "Dim Boundaries" group *were* in fact shaped by their sexuality, then the narratives they draw on to make sense of their career decisions are especially troubling, as their narratives would serve to uphold unequal social arrangements by obscuring the larger systems of inequality that shaped their lived experiences and subsequent decisions. More specifically, if their decisions were indeed shaped in part by their experiences as someone with a devalued identity characteristic, then providing agentic accounts of their career selection process that minimizes the role that sexuality played in shaping these decisions works to conceal the constraining and detrimental impacts that homophobia and heteronormativity have on the lives of queer men.

The goal of this chapter was not to capture the precise motives underscoring the career decisions of queer men at the time they were making these decisions but rather, to understand the narratives queer men are drawing on to make sense of the world of work and their decisions pertaining to it. Our experiences are given meaning through the narratives we use to explain them, as Somers (1994) noted, "…people make sense of what *has* happened and *is* happening to them by attempting to assemble or in some way integrate these happenings within one or more narratives" (p. 614). Further, in constructing these narratives, we can challenge or uphold existing systems of inequality (Ewick and Silbey 1995; Ewick and Silbey 2003; Ueno et al. 2018). Peoples motives in making decisions can be multiple and contradictory (Vaisey 2009; Pugh 2013), but the factors that people draw on to make sense of their decisions and experiences help to give these factors, such as sexuality, their meaning.

CHAPTER 4

Navigating the Labor Market

INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, in both popular discourse and scholarship alike, there has been much attention paid to the ways in which sexuality operates in the labor market as well as to the legislative efforts, or lack thereof, that seek to protect LGBT workers and job-seekers from potential discrimination and marginalization (HRC 2017). This attention is not without merit, as only 26 states currently prohibit workplace discrimination on the basis of sexuality (HRC 2017). Further, the current political climate works to threaten the limited protections currently offered, which likely increases the risk of queer individuals encountering discrimination on the labor market.

Recent scholarship has begun to detail the extent of hiring discrimination against gay and lesbian job seekers, demonstrating that both gay men (Tilscik 2011) and lesbians (Mishel 2016) encounter persistent disadvantages in obtaining callbacks for jobs, with openly gay men being roughly 40% less likely than their straight-identifying counterparts to receive a callback for an interview. Work has also shown that with regard to gay-identifying men, there is little variation across industry (Tilcsik 2011), demonstrating a ubiquitous devaluation of gay identity in the labor market. This widespread devaluation of queer men on the labor market, past scholarship notes, is due in large part to the taken-for-granted assumptions surrounding queer men (Madon 1997; Tilcsik 2011). Queer men are stereotyped as being weak, sensitive, emotiona, passive, and unable to conform to hegemonic masculine ideals such as being assertive and decisive (Madon 1997; Connell 2005). Sexual orientation operates as a diffuse status characteristic in the sphere of work, resulting in both different and lowered performance expectations for queer men, due in large part to the association between queer sexual identities and femininity, with regard to men (Madon 1997; Tilcsik 2011; Cech and Rothwell 2020). Since hegemonic masculinity is valued in most occupations and industries, cultural assumptions about queer men's assumed inability to embody these traits serves as a chief mechanism of labor market stratification (Tilcsik 2011). Further, cultural assumptions surrounding queer men are deeply racialized. Emergent research finds that employment discrimination against queer men varies along racial lines, with queer Black men actually receiving an "advantage" on the labor market compared to queer white and straight Black men (Pedulla 2014). Though without the data to say, the author argues that this may in fact be due to cultural ideas about Black masculinity (i.e. hypermasculine and aggressive) offsetting cultural ideas about queer masculinity (i.e. weak and effeminate), and vice versa—allowing others to see queer Black men as more masculine, and thus competent, than queer white men and less threatening than straight Black men.

We know that queer men face discrimination on the labor market, but we currently know less about how queer-identifying men respond to the reality of such discrimination (Tilcsik 2011). More specifically, how do queer men understand the significance that their sexuality takes on in the labor market, and what identity management strategies do they employ in response? Further, given how deeply racialized cultural assumptions about queerness are, how may these strategies be shaped by race? Given that sexuality often operates as an often invisible status characteristic (Tilcsik, Anteby and Knight 2015; Cech and Rothwell 2020)—or one that may not be readily discernable—queer men may have greater agency than those with visible status characteristics with regard to how they negotiate this identity in seeking employment.

Circumventing Stigma and Identity Management

As mentioned in Chapter 3, queer sexualities operate as a form of concealable stigma (Tilcsik, Anteby and Knight 2015). Thus, queer men can employ a variety of identity management strategies when navigating the labor market. Past work has shown that in navigating the workplace, queer men deploy a range of identity management strategies: passing (concealing their sexuality), covering (downplaying aspects associated with their sexuality), and disclosing (making their sexuality known to others) (Waldo 1999; Ward and Winstanley 2005; Yoshino 2006). These identity management strategies are mechanisms that individuals use to control how they are perceived by others (Goffman 1963; Waldo 1999; Yoshino 2006; Reid 2015). The perceived need to engage in identity management strategies is especially pressing for members of stigmatized groups, such as queer men, when navigating contexts where they are in the numerical minority (Goffman 1963; Reid 2015). To mitigate the social distance between themselves and those in the advantaged group, members of stigmatized groups often deploy strategies so as to mitigate the stigma surrounding their identity characteristics and facilitate social interactions in a given context (Goffman 1963). Yet, the strategies that queer men use to respond to this perceived distance are not uniform. In fact, even those queer men who believe their sexuality could disadvantage them on the labor market face a dilemma of disclosure; as Tilcsik (2011) notes, concealing one's sexuality may help them in securing employment, but concealment is emotionally taxing. Further, disclosing during the interview stage may allow queer job seekers to assess the organizational climate and how accepting it may be of their queer sexuality (Tilcsik 2011). Given that respondents in this sample are college educated and living and working in New York City, they may be in a particularly good position to "weed out" intolerant employers by disclosing their sexuality during the application and interview stage.

These identity management strategies, however, are often situational—meaning that they vary by context and are impacted by situational factors, such as ones audience, how accepting they believe others to be, and the potential consequences of disclosing in that given time and place (Waldo 1999; Ragins and Cornwall 2001; Ward and Winstanley 2005; Yoshino 2006; Reid 2015). Most often, queer men have to rely on quick assessments of their audience and assess the meaning that their sexuality would take on in that context (Waldo 1999; Ward and Winstanley 2005; Yoshino 2006; Tilscik, Anteby and Knight 2015). In the context of the job application and interview, queer men may rely on ideas of "cultural fit" (Rivera 2012) in determining their identity management strategies, relying on ideas about what it means to work in the given occupation or industry, *who* can successfully do it, and whether their sexuality serves to challenge their ability to secure employment in a given line of work. Further, extant work pertaining to queer persons and the labor market has focused on disclosure and circumventing discrimination. In this chapter, I will demonstrate that in order to more fully understand the experiences of queer men on the labor market, it is important to not only consider decisions of disclosure but also how queer men portray competence more broadly and how this may vary by industry and occupation.

The Ideal Worker as a Cultural Schema

The image of the ideal worker is one such way that individuals assess fit within a given occupation or industry (Acker 1990; Rivera 2012; Reid 2015). As noted in the introduction, the ideal worker is an ideal type—a professional identity associated with a worker who puts work above all else and is fully committed to their work and work organization (Acker 1990; Blair-

Loy 2003; Reid 2015). The ideal worker image operates as a cultural schema, or shared cultural ideas that "provide default assumptions…under conditions of incomplete information (DiMaggio 1997: 267). The cultural schema of the ideal worker varies by industry, occupation, and work organization, and it is most often associated with particular identity characteristics, which most commonly privilege straight white men and the valued traits that are commonly associated with members of this identity group, such as assertiveness and competitiveness (Acker 1990; Blair-Loy 2003; Reid 2015). The ideal worker image impacts the ways in which individuals act within their workplace, as they often feeling pressure to align with this image to succeed at work (Blair-Loy 2003; Reid 3015). Further, scholarship has demonstrated that the impacts of the ideal worker image extend beyond the workplace and often shape labor market outcomes as well (Acker 1990; Rivera 2012).

The ideal worker image is particularly resistant to change, as it is based on those who have previously successfully filled such roles (Acker 1990). In delineating who can and cannot be successful within a given position, this cultural schema provides the criteria by which job candidates are evaluated and compared against (Rivera 2012). Given that the ideal workers in most occupations and industries are straight white men, individuals with marginalized identities likely face both covert and overt disadvantages with regard to how they are evaluated (Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Pager, Western and Bonikowski 2009; Tilcsik 2011; Quadlin 2018). Thus, job-seekers who belong to marginalized or under-represented groups regularly take up particular identity management strategies on the labor market in order to secure employment (Kang et al. 2016). These strategies are shaped by prevailing collective narratives, which specify the mechanisms undergirding the relationship between an attribute (i.e. being gay) and an outcome (securing employment in a given occupation) (Alexander and Smith 1993; Polletta 2009; Frye

2017). One such prevailing narrative, for example, could be that gay men who downplay their sexuality are more likely to secure employment in male-dominated fields than those who make it salient. These collective narratives mold our expectations, which shape behavior at the individual-level (Somers 1994). Yet, given the variation in different industry's ideal worker image, it is probable that narratives regarding how best to secure employment also vary widely and likely by industry or occupation. For example, past work has shown that fields and occupations are often gendered and framed as masculine, feminine, or gender neutral (Ridgeway 2011; Smith-Doerr et al. 2019) and that these different framings lead to different ideal worker images and ideas about how to best display competence.

Schemas, Narratives, and Navigating the Labor Market

Research shows that job seekers often understand and respond to a given occupations ideal worker image, and even make decisions about where to apply based on their own ideas about the identities of those in the organization and those who have previously filled such roles (Barbulescu and Bidwell 2013). An organizations ideal worker image also impacts the identity management strategies that workers take up their workplaces in an attempt to accrue advantages and mitigate disadvantage at work (Reid 2015). Less is known, however, about how cultural schemas such as the ideal worker image may impact the ways in which individuals navigate the labor market and interview process. Exploring this could explicate the ways in which cultural understandings, such as schemas and narratives, operate as mechanisms of stratification on the labor market, highlighting forms of categorical difference and shaping behavior. Further, though work has shown that individuals feel the need to respond to the distance between themselves and the ideal worker image through engaging in identity management, there is a need to explicate the actual identity management processes that individuals engage in (Reid 2015). For example, what does identity management look like for queer men navigating the labor market, and how may this vary by industry or occupation? What do they leverage to pass, cover, conceal, or even signal their sexuality? Given longstanding ideas about queer men and femininity, it may be that queer men rely on gender presentation and performance in order to circumvent the stigma surrounding their sexuality. As noted by Tilcsik (2011), "…to the extent that some aspects of 'masculine' behavior are observable during this stage, interviewers may rely less on stereotypes and more on observations of individual attributes" (p. 620).

As noted by Rivera (2015), the bulk of sociological research on hiring has understood these decisions as products of a firm's needs and an applicant's human capital. Yet, emergent work contends that hiring is best conceptualized as a deeply emotional and interpersonal process, driven primarily by feelings of commonality and emotional excitement (Rivera 2012; Rivera 2015). Above things such as demonstrated productivity and ability, evaluators are most drawn to those who they feel a sense of "cultural fit" with, as similarities in experience, taste, and leisure pursuits evoke positive emotional responses and generate feels of excitement between the evaluator and applicant (Rivera 2012; Rivera 2015). Given the centrality of shared culture, these gatekeeping rituals (Rivera 2015) can help reproduce homosocial reproduction (Kanter 1977) within organizations, where masculine organizational cultures persist, despite increased diversity in representation within the organization (Rivera 2012; Rivera 2015). Yet, while excluding those who are unable to display the proper "cultural signals", the reliance on similarities and emotional excitement may also allow members of marginalized and under-represented groups to successfully navigate the labor market, so long as they display the right cultural signals in interview contexts (Rivera 2012; Rivera 2015). Thus, the ways in which queer men understand the labor market are likely diverse, as are the identity management strategies they take up in their attempts to secure employment. It could be, for example, that queer men who were raised in upper middle-class households and participated in traditionally masculine extra-curriculars and leisure pursuits see their sexuality as being largely inconsequential on the labor market and feel little need to engage in any particular identity management strategies during their job interviews.

Given documented patterns of discrimination of queer men on the labor market and the concealable nature of sexuality, this chapter asks: how do queer men navigate the labor market? This chapter seeks to explore both for whom sexuality takes on a salient character on the labor market and how queer men do or do not respond to its assumed symbolic significance.

In this chapter, I argue that whether queer men in my sample believed their experiences on the labor market were shaped by their sexuality was predicted on the perceived consequences of being queer in their chosen occupation or industry, which was largely tied to ideas about what constitutes an ideal worker in their chosen industry and their perceived distance from this image. Further, I find that these experiences on the labor market were deeply racialized, with queer Black men in particular noting either facing unique advantages or challenges given their racial and sexuality, and with these differences largely being tied to the industry in which they were seeking employment.

The focus of this chapter are the narratives queer men in my sample provided to make sense of their experience on the labor market. By this, I mean the ways in which they crafted their resume and application materials (such as a cover letter or personal statement) as well as their post-college interview experiences. Similar to Chapter 3, I allowed respondents to walk me through each step of their application process without particular questions pertaining to their sexuality so as to not assume that their sexuality influenced their labor market experience. After respondents discussed their experiences on the labor market, I would ask if there was any mention or allusion (such as involvement in a queer-related club or research activity) to their sexuality on their resume. Further, I would ask if they believe their sexuality impacted the way that they acted at their interviews. If respondents had conveyed, either in their original narrative or in my follow-up questions, that their experiences on the labor market were impacted in any way by their sexuality, I would ask them to elaborate both on *why* they believed it to be consequential and *how* they responded to this. For those respondents who did not believe their sexuality shaped their experiences on the labor market, I would similarly ask why they believed it to be the case and then ask them to walk me through their self-presentation during their interviews.

Once again, I arrange this chapter along the lines of boundary brightness, distinguishing those who perceived distance between themselves and their chosen occupation/industry's ideal worker and believed their sexuality shaped their experience on the labor market (the Bright boundaries group) and those who saw no such distance and did not believe that their sexuality played any such role (the Dim Boundaries group), while playing particular attention to the identity management strategies queer men deploy in navigating the labor market.

Perceived Distance and Bright Boundaries?

Who perceived distance between themselves and the ideal worker image for their occupation/industry?

30 respondents in my sample noted believing that their sexuality and/or others perception of their sexuality made them sufficiently different from the ideal worker of their chosen industry or occupation when they were on the labor market. Those in the "Consistently Bright" and "Brightened Boundaries" group all expressed perceiving distance at this stage, largely because men in these group believed that the ideal worker in their chosen occupation and industry was

either (1) a straight, masculine-presenting man or (2) a stereotypically feminine woman. Further, men in this group believed that their queer identity worked to make them sufficiently different from the ideal worker image so that it could serve as a mechanism for disadvantage (or in some cases advantage) for them on the labor market. For example, Donovan, a mixed-race (Black/Hispanic) elementary school teacher, noted the stereotypes that gay men in his profession face:

> So [others will] say if you're gay and you're a teacher they'd be a pedophile or you can't hug the child or they can't sit in your lap because they sexualize it for some reason. So I've noticed with some teachers, if they think I'm straight then they don't have a problem, but if they know ... Like some of the other subs that are openly gay, they're like oh the child can't sit in your lap or something like that.

Donovan noted that the occupation of elementary school educators is "very female dominated" and that the ideal worker for elementary school teachers are women and even straight-identifying men. Queer men, he believed, would be met with suspicion in this occupation, largely because of an association between queerness and hypersexuality. Donovan's sexuality and its deviation from his industries ideal worker image, then, would challenge his claims to trust and ability in his given profession. Similarly, Henry (white, 49, finance), working in finance noted expecting discrimination at the hiring stage because of the industry he was entering into. When asked if he anticipated "having acceptance" moving into his line of work, he responded:

> No. Because I didn't know. I hadn't seen [acceptance] in the business at all. That's not to say that there wasn't still tons of homophobia, and that there is still tons of homophobia. But the business is run by white, straight men in their 50's and 60's.

Similarly, when asked about his experiences with auditioning for roles in theatre, Douglas (white, 31, theatre) articulated a frustration with an incongruence between his sexuality/gender presentation and the ideal male worker in the theatre industry:

> I wish that there were more roles that I didn't have to pretend to be straight…It's not that I want to just, excuse my language, I don't know if this is bad, but I don't want to fag out all the time, but I don't want to have to pretend to be something that I'm not. Technically, that's what I'm being employed for is to pretend, but I'm getting sent in for Hello Dolly and American in Paris and the guys that are really conventionally handsome and not in any way homosexual looking, acting, singing, dancing, tend to get kept more, which is frustrating.

The above accounts highlight the role that stereotypes and representation (perceived or real) play in shaping the significance they attributed to their sexuality in their line of work. For men in the Consistently Bright and Brightened Boundaries groups, they understood their sexuality and others perceptions of it as impediments to securing employment in their chosen field, largely because these stereotypes stood in contrast to what is valued of workers in that given field.

Stereotypes took on a more constraining character when on the labor market, especially when they are tied to idea about queerness and competency. This was true for queer men across a wide variety of industries, including theatre, dance, educated, finance, and STEM. What tied the narratives of these men together was a belief that their sexuality challenged their claims to competence and ability in their chosen field. Queer men in theatre and dance consistently saw that leading roles were given to straight-identifying men or straight-presenting queer men. Take, for example, the narrative of Chris, a 28-year-old white man pursuing a career in musical theatre, who noted learning early on that queer men faced a disadvantage in theatre:

> Chris: Right, so when I was doing theater in college, directors, no matter how much or how little talent, they had tended to gravitate towards the guy who looked like he was a football player.
> Billy: Really?
> Chris: Oh, yeah. Oh my god. Straight guys flourish [in theatre], because for some reason [casting directors] are just convinced that they can't teach the gay guys how to act straight.
> Billy: They're convinced of that?
> Chris: I don't know. Apparently. They don't ever cast gay guys as any of the leads in any of the shows, even though they are more talent

Chris (white, 28, theatre) articulates that coming across as queer challenges his claims to competency in his chosen career, largely because of an assumption that queer men are not able to believably play a hegemonically masculine, straight-identifying character. In following up, I asked if these ideas made it so that queer men were not able to gain employment in musical theatre, to which he responded, "I know there are a lot of gay men on Broadway. I think they're normally the really ... if they're playing lead roles, they're probably the more stereotypically handsome, fit men." This narrative demonstrates that queer men who are able to circumvent stereotypes associated with queer men, or "pass" as straight, are the ones in the best position to gain employment in theatre.

Stereotypes also shaped the experiences of queer men seeking employment in more masculine professions, such as STEM or finance. Respondents in these professions relied heavily on preconceived ideas about the types of workers (i.e. straight, masculine presenting, white men) who make up their industry when discussing the role their sexuality played in shaping their experience on the labor market. Take Martin, a Hispanic man working in finance at one of Wall Streets biggest banks, who noted understanding he was seeking employment in a "vanilla" industry when he was on the labor market. When I asked what he meant, he stated:

> All of these people who are like Johns and Chads and Beckys. And they all talk about where they're gonna go on their college tour with, they all went to the same schools. They talk the same way. Even if they're different races, they don't know anything else but English. If they're gay, they're very, they're not gay. They're mainstream, whatever. I don't even think of them as really, quite frankly, queer.

Similar to the narratives of queer men in the theatre industry, Martin noted that although he believed queerness was not valued in his chosen field, he understood that queer men might be able to successfully enter into finance if they enact more rigid and hegemonic gender presentations and performances. These narratives highlight that both the stereotypes of and representation within certain industries worked to brighten boundaries for queer men on the labor market.[7]

Responding to Distance: How did those men who perceived distance from the ideal worker image respond to it?

Respondents who perceived a bright boundary between themselves and the ideal worker image in their chosen field utilized different strategies when navigating the labor market. There were two different strategies deployed by those in the "Consistently Bright" and "Brightened Boundaries" groups: (1) disclosing their sexuality, either in their application materials or during the interview, or (2) attempting to play up their masculinity during job interviews and auditions so that they would be seen as competent enough for the job. The reasons for engaging in either strategy were quite different from one another; those in these groups who reported disclosing their sexuality, despite understanding their industry's straight and masculine ideal worker image, reported doing so in an attempt to "test the waters" of the organization, allowing them to assess how accepting the organization would be to having an openly queer man employed in their work organization. These respondents most often belonged to the "Brightened Boundaries" group and were most commonly employed in more masculine and bureaucratic field, such as finance. For example, Henry (49, white, finance), who worked on Wall Street, recounts openly disclosing during his latest job interview (which occurred a little over 10 years ago):

> Henry: I said "I'm gay, I just wanted to make sure you knew, so there's no surprises." He goes "Its okay, its okay, its okay."
> Billy: In the interview?

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[7] Representation during the actual job interview was also something that a number of respondents noted having shaped their experiences and identity management strategies. A number of respondents, for example, expressed greater comfort with interviewees who were women or who they believed were queer, and expressed greater discomfort and pressure to engage in more rigid and hegemonically masculine gender performances when the interviewee was assumed to be a straight-identifying man.

> Henry: Yeah. Just like that. I was like "I'm not sure if it's okay if you say it like that. But it's out there." And I later found out that he had shared with other people, that..he was like "I have so much respect for this guy. This guy is not going to put up with any shit."

When I asked why disclosing during the interview was important for him, he responded:

> Because [there used to be] no visible representation or protection. But it was important to me, because I wasn't going to come into some homophobic firm, where I felt like I had to step back into the closet to be successful.

Above, Henry notes that given the lack of queer representation in his chosen industry, he understood his sexuality as potentially stigmatizing in this sphere. In response to this, he decided to disclose his sexuality during the interview to assess organizational climate and to foreclose the possibility of entering into an unaccepting workplace. Similarly, Martin from before, who understood his chosen industry as likely being "vanilla" and heteronormative, decided to play up his femininity during his job interview, both in an attempt to assess organizational climate and to let those interviewing him understand that he did not intend on hiding or concealing his sexuality at work:

> I was honest. I went in a mesh shirt and my sweat pants and my Adidas. Because I was like, if they're going to hire me, I'm going to be who I am. And I thought that was a good sign.

When I asked if he wore a mesh shirt to signal his sexuality, he stated:

> Billy: And so you, just to touch on that, you went in a mesh shirt. Was that to signal that you were an openly queer person?
> Martin: Yeah. And that I wore clothes like that. And that was like what I was.
> Billy: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Why did you do that for the interview?
> Martin: I figured if I got the job, still having done that, then that meant I could be safe. I could be okay. I didn't have to go in a polo, that we had to wear. I didn't want to have to be someone I wasn't.

These narratives demonstrate that one way in which queer men respond to the perceived distance between themselves and their chosen field's ideal worker on the labor market is to make this distance salient to employers. They believed that it would be worse to feel pressure to pretend to be something that they are not than it would be to not receive an offer because of their sexuality. It is important to note, however, that nearly all respondents in the "Consistently Bright" and "Brightened Boundaries" category who reported disclosing their sexuality noted that they believed they would have little trouble finding employment even if one organization rejected them on the basis of their sexuality, largely because they obtained their degrees in highly employable majors (i.e. STEM, business administration, etc.) and felt qualified to be seeking employment in lucrative industries. These men, then, viewed the labor market as less of a sphere where the employers held all power and more like a market where they had options about where they would like to work.

A few queer men of color also noted disclosing or signaling their sexuality during their interview but noted doing so for different reasons than white respondents. Whereas white respondents in the "Consistently Bright" or "Brightened Boundaries" groups disclosed their sexuality to assess organizational climate and highlight something they believed to be core to their self-understanding, queer men of color who reported disclosing noted doing so because they believed it would make them more employable. Marcus (Black, 26, law office secretary), in fact, believed that he was hired specifically because he is gay, which he believed was an asset in signaling his creativity and progressiveness:

> Marcus: I think that they prefer a gay Black man. I'm trying to think if they would prefer me or a straight white man. I still think the sexuality component is [important] because I think that's associated with creativity and it has connotations with being liberal and open-minded. *Yeah. I'm pretty sure that's why I got placed there by my agent because I was read as gay by my agent, and she figured it would be a good placement.* And it was a good placement.
> Billy: Yeah. So, you didn't even have to come out to her. She just read you and placed you there?
> Marcus: Yeah. I'm 90% sure, because she told me, she's like, "That place is really, really tough, and they don't take to a lot of people. So, that's great that you're doing so well." And I was thinking, "Yeah," because I would do other jobs, other events through my temp agency with other straight guys. And I'm

> thinking they would probably never get placed at NARS for the exact opposite reason that I got placed.

The account of Marcus demonstrates that he believes his sexuality helped him land his current job. Whereas white men in the “Consistently Bright” and “Brightened Boundaries” groups disclosed in spite of the distance between themselves and the ideal worker image, queer men of color who disclosed or signaled noted that others perceptions of them as queer likely bolstered their claims to competence and ability.

Though nearly all of the men in the “Consistently Bright” and “Brightened Boundaries” group who disclosed or signaled their sexuality were employed in high-status and stereotypically masculine occupations, not all respondents employed in these occupations decided to disclose. Take, for example, Nick (Hispanic, 27, tech consulting), who noted not only purposefully not disclosing his sexuality during his job interview but also trying to manipulate his gender performance and play up his masculinity in an attempt to garner employment in a high-status law firm he had previously worked at:

> I viewed that as a big career opportunity, so I felt that there was a lot of pressure for that reason. The law firm was staffed by older attorneys who I didn’t know how to relate to, that I didn’t have any social context with, and I just snapped. They were all very serious and not friendly, warm people. So, my reflex was to snap into this idea of how a normative, serious male performance, performing gender, that’s what I reflexively went into in order to be the most confident I could be in the job interview.

Nick notes this pressure to play up his masculinity stemmed from both (1) the potential for significant career advancement and (2) the composition of the law firm and his perceptions of the general personality of the organization. Though he now states that his masculine gender performance during the interview was not necessary as he found the law firm to be accepting, he relayed that his pre-conceived ideas about what it meant to be employable in this given industry shaped his identity negotiations during the interview, stating “I attributed that to just internalized homophobia and being concerned or worried about how I presented myself if it wasn't in a masculine sort of way, in a normative way, that would reduce my job possibilities, and improving the potential for being hired for the job." Nick relayed feeling constrained by ideas he held about what it meant to be employable in his chosen field, which he reported as being someone who was able to properly perform masculinity.

Respondents who reported playing up their masculinity, or "pass" as straight did so because they believed that being able to embody hegemonic masculinity was a necessary requisite for gaining employment in their chosen field, and an inability do so would result in unemployment. Though there are a few exceptions, most of the men who chose to either pass as straight or play up their masculinity fell into the "Consistently Bright" category and were most commonly seeking employment in theatre, art, or dance. Respondents here did not articulate that their industry was homophobia but that if casting directors knew or could tell that they were gay, they would likely have doubts about their ability to play a straight, hegemonically masculine character, which they noted comprises most of the male roles in theatre and dance. Louis (white, 27, theatre) notes that he needs to come across as masculine to be taken seriously for many of the roles that he goes into audition for:

> So if there's a role in a musical and the guys falls in love with a girl, they're not gonna pick me, if I'm flamboyant or feminine or anything like that. 'Cause it just doesn't tell the story right. So, being masculine and coming across heterosexual would work in my favor. But then that's so called acting.

Louis articulates that given that most roles for men are straight-identifying and masculine, his gender presentation and sexuality serve as sources of potential disadvantage for him in booking roles. All of the men pursuing a career in theatre and dance noted the importance of "posture" and "physicality" during auditions to present as someone who is capable of playing straight, masculine characters. These points will be elaborated on further in the next chapter, but it is important to note that an inability to do so during auditions resulted most commonly in rejection and an inability to secure employment. Take, for example, Douglas (white, 31, performer) from earlier, who noted his gender presentation as hurting his ability to book jobs:

> Yeah, the last couple of auditions, it's like, one of these things is not like the other. Just because I don't go to the gym eight times a day and because I have a quirkier physicality and I can be more effeminate, I'm getting cut immediately, which is really frustrating.

Douglas articulates that his gender presentation and less masculine physical appearance as standing in contrast to the look and presentation that most casting agents and directors are looking for. Respondents who chose to play up their masculinity in an attempt to align themselves with their industry's ideal worker image did not articulate the same sense of agency as those men who disclosed or signaled their sexuality. Rather, they understood their employment prospects as more tenuous, compelling them to adopt identity management strategies that would maximize their employment opportunities.

Queer men of color in theatre and dance were in an even more tenuous position, noting a pressure to not only play up their masculinity but also to align with stereotypical images surrounding Blackness. These respondents noted not only a lack of roles for them to play but also a frustration with casting directors only taking them seriously when they were reading for parts that are written specifically for Black men. Terry (26 years old), a mixed-race (Black/white) dancer and musical theatre performer, noted not only having to build up muscle and lower his voice to be seen as masculine on auditions but also the burden he faces as a Black man in the performing arts:

> I feel like there's a standard, I feel like yeah there tend to be specific shows that you're sought out for. And kind of a specific vocal part, it's not always true…definitely more sort of soulful things are associated with being a Black performer. Which again for me, is kind of a weird zone. Because my voice has more of a rock, or country feel which puts me in a weird place when I'm if I'm

> going to play the ethnic person. And I'm expected to sound … soulful, and I don't know, more R and B. And it's not really necessarily me.

This narrative was echoed by Derrick (Black, 30, Theatre) a Black man pursuing a career in musical theatre. After graduating from one of the top programs in the country for the dramatic arts, he and his peers began to prepare for a showcase performance at a famous venue for casting directors, where they perform songs from Broadway shows to a room full of casting directors and agents in an attempt to be called in to audition for a show or be signed to a prominent casting agency. In preparing for this performance, casting directors warned him against singing songs from white characters and suggested instead that he stick to his "type" and sing a song performed by the donkey in Shrek the musical.

> …they were trying to make me something I didn't want to be. They wanted me to be the funny Black man. "Oh, we want you to sing upbeat. That's who you are."

When asked what he wanted to sing for his showcase, he replied:

> Something that was void of race, void of character. Something that could just show me and just show me really wanting something.

Instead, the casting directors handed him songs from "The Wiz" and "Shrek", which they told him would be more likely to highlight his strengths and get him cast. When asked how he felt about that, he replied:

> They're clearly…that's not the stuff I'm going to have a problem getting seen for. Its them [casting directors] being able to see like, "Hey, this person can be a human being. This person can be real and tender."

Ultimately, Derrick took the casting directors advice on what songs to sing at the showcase and was *not* signed to a casting agency or called in for any auditions after the showcase.

Who did not see distance on the labor market?

Respondents in the "Never Bright" and "Dimmed Boundaries" groups did not see any distance between themselves and their occupations/industry's ideal worker image, though they had vastly different reasons for perceiving little distance. Whereas those in the "Never Bright" group expressed a belief that their sexuality would not be a salient aspect of their experience on the labor market that could serve as the basis for discrimination, those in the "Dimmed Boundaries" group were seeking employment in organizations and industries where they believed the ideal worker was explicitly queer or where being queer would not challenge their claims to competency, expertise, and respect.

As noted in previous chapters, respondents in the "Never Bright" group had more masculine self-conceptions and meritocratic views of the labor market than those respondents in other groups. Respondents in this group often echoed a sentiment that skills are what matter most and determine labor market outcomes and that they likely would not face any sort of disadvantages on the labor market because their sexuality so long as they are qualified for the position. Thus, they were less likely to see their sexuality as serving as a positive or negative form of difference for them on the labor market. For example, when asked if he ever thought about how accepting the organization he was interviewing at would be of queer men, Interview Jason (Hispanic, 32, Finance) responded:

> No, it was never really something that I thought about. I mean, I never really ... Sexuality to me was always secondary. It's never been like I'm living my life because I'm a gay man. It's always just been like, "Oh, yeah, by the way, I'm gay." Even now, I don't come out to my coworkers or say ... You know, it's not some ... I kind of keep my private life private. So, my job is my job.

Many respondents in this group noted that employers are not even allowed to ask questions pertaining to one's sexuality, and they felt that such questions are outside the realm of possibility of even being asked during interviews. Men in this group noted that topics pertaining to their sexuality would almost certainly not come up during a job interview and that if they did, it likely would not serve as a basis for disadvantage for them in securing employment.

Unlike respondents in the “Consistently Bright” or “Brightened Boundaries” groups, those in the “Never Bright” group both (1) did not believe their sexuality could or would serve as the basis for discrimination on the labor market and (2) did not see it as something that was important to signal or disclose during job interviews. Yet, much like respondents in the “Brightened Boundaries” group, many men in the “Never Bright” group were entering into occupations and industries where the ideal worker is hegemonically masculine and straight. So why the difference in their understandings of the role sexuality plays on the labor market? Whereas those in the “Brightened Boundaries” category saw their sexuality as something that meaningfully differentiated them from their chosen profession’s ideal worker, those in the “Never Bright” group did not, due in large part to their own self-conceptions and past experiences. For example, when asked about whether he thought about his sexuality when entering into engineering, Roy (Hispanic, 31), a software engineer noted:

> I was never afraid of that, it never occurred to me that I was a minority in this field. Also, you have to know that I acknowledge that I grew up in a privileged position in the DR so maybe it never occurred to me to be like “oh, I’m gay and I am going to be an engineer, I am afraid…,” no. Absolutely the opposite. I believed that I am gay, I am very focused, I like to study, *that* stereotype. But now I see the reality…

Roy highlights that his relative lack of disadvantage on the basis of his sexuality likely not only shaped whether he believed he would face discrimination but also allowed him to see his sexuality as something that could even make him successful as an engineer, though this did not match the reality he faced once in the workforce. For respondents in the “Never Bright” group, their queer sexuality was one component of who they were and not one that would challenge their ability to be successful in their chosen field of work. Further, men in this group were less likely than men in every other group to note that being “out” at work as important for them. For example, Greg (white, 27, educational finance) noted not having come out to his coworkers because he did not find it important to disclose, noting “I didn’t feel it was important for me to tell. Yeah, I don’t know. I don’t want to say I didn’t make a huge deal about it…but I just didn’t feel I needed to [disclose].” Respondents in the “Never Bright” category had a different understanding of the role that work played in their lives, most often articulating a belief that work is a sphere to gain financial security, esteem, and personal success, not one where they felt a need to have their sexuality validated.

Similar to those in the “Never Bright” group, respondents in the “Dimmed Boundaries” group also saw little distance between themselves and their chosen field’s ideal worker image. What differentiated the narratives of these two groups, however, was that those in the “Dimmed Boundaries” group were entering into fields and occupations that were predominantly queer. Though those in the “Dimmed Boundaries” group believed that their sexuality influenced their career-related decisions, the boundary surrounding their sexuality was “Dim” when entering the labor market because they believed that their selected field of employment worked to mitigate any potential stigma or discrimination pertaining to their sexuality. Respondents in the “Dimmed Boundaries” group noted that they were entering into fields that were either explicitly queer in their focus (i.e. queer-related research or organizing) or where being queer would either have no impact or serve as an advantage in their attempts to garner employment. Take this exchange with Matthew (Hispanic, 25, Public Health PhD), when asked if he disclosed during his interview process:

> Billy: …did you disclose your own sexuality?
> Matthew: I wrote about it in my statement so they knew everything.
> Billy: Okay.
> Matthew: No one really asked about it though.
> Billy: Did you perceive that that was going to be something that could hurt you in the application process?
> Matthew: Not at all.
> Billy: Why?

> Matthew: All the mentors that I was applying to were gay, or I thought were gay and I was right. And mostly because it was CUNY too. As much as I kept reading on about CUNY, they have the most diverse population of students in New York. They are very liberal in that sense of they are very pushing the boundaries. They want minorities everywhere. I didn't really think that would hurt me.

Matthew indicates that given the queer representation in this field and specifically at his university, his queer identity likely would not impede his chances at getting into graduate school. Similarly, Benjamin (Hispanic, 46) articulated openly disclosing his sexuality in his interview to become a community organizer, stating he did so "…because of the work. A lot of the work was HIV. That was statistically still with folks that were over-impacted, yes are women and queer men of color and transgender women of color." Benjamin notes that not only would his sexuality (and race) likely not disadvantage him but also that it is relevant to the work and thus, he felt it was fine or even necessary to disclose.

Some respondents in the "Dimmed Boundaries" group were not entering work organizations or industries that were explicitly queer but still believed that their sexuality was not inconsistent with the ideal worker of the organization they were interviewing at. These respondents noted believing this was the case either because (1) the hiring manager interviewing them was a queer man or (2) they were encouraged to apply by other queer men who worked and were successful in the organization. Take Craig (white, 29, Customer Support Specialist in Tech company):

> Billy: What made you feel as though that would be welcomed and encouraged?
> Craig: I knew [my friend] was already working here for eight or so months at that time, and had visited this office and been at barbecues on this rooftop.
> Billy: Oh, very cool.
> Craig: So … I had a chance to know the office and the co-workers prior to going for the interview.
> Billy: Yeah. So what was it about the office and the co-workers that made you feel like this would probably be a pretty good fit for me and I could probably be who I am here?
> Craig: A majority of the men here are gay.

Craig notes that his company's large queer representation served as an indicator that he would be a good fit at his current workplace. Those in the "Dimmed Boundaries" group, then, saw no distance between themselves and their chosen field's ideal worker image either because their work organization had an explicitly queer mission or because queer representation within the organization made them believe that their sexuality would not hinder their ability to succeed in the organization.

Similar to respondents in the "Never Bright" group, respondents in the "Dimmed Boundaries" group did not see any symbolic distance between themselves and their field's ideal worker image. They differed, however, in how they responded to this lack of distance during job interviews. Whereas those in the "Never Bright" category chose not to disclose their sexuality, and were often confused as to why anybody would, those in the "Dimmed Boundaries" category often reported freely disclosing their sexuality in their application materials and during job interviews. For those respondents in the "Dimmed Boundaries" category who did not disclose during their job interviews, they noted not doing so simply because it did not come up and they felt free to "be themselves" during the job interview, largely due to a lack of fear of facing stigmatization or discrimination for doing so.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have argued that the way that queer men think about and navigate the labor market is largely shaped by the image of the ideal worker. Respondent's understandings of their field's ideal worker and the symbolic distance they perceived between themselves and this ideal type influenced their experiences and strategies on the labor market. Stereotypes and cultural expectations surrounding queerness and fit within a given line of work shaped how bright of a boundary respondents perceived surrounding their sexuality on the labor market, which shaped their identity management strategies in their attempts to secure employment. Those respondents who believed their sexuality made them significantly different from the ideal worker in the industry they were seeking employment in felt a need to respond to this distance. Yet, the strategies that respondents used to mitigate this distance were varied; some disclosed their sexuality, others played up their femininity in an attempt to portray themselves as queer, and others chose to play up their masculinity in an attempt to either pass as straight or be seen as competent in their line of work.

Extant work has documented the reality of discrimination that queer job-seekers face in the United States (Tilcsik 2011; Mishel 2016). But how do queer individuals make sense of their sexuality on the labor market? This project adds to this literature by examining how queer men understand their experience on the labor market and the strategies that they used in securing employment. Thus, this chapter asks two questions: (1) For whom is sexuality salient on the labor market and (2) how does this shape the way in which they attempt to garner employment? In leaving open the possibility that queer men did not believe their sexuality to be a salient aspect of their labor market experience, this project is able to better understand for whom sexuality matters on the labor market and the multitude of strategies queer job-seekers utilize in seeking to gain employment. As in Chapter 3, respondents varied widely with respect to the significance attributed to their sexuality when navigating the labor market.

What makes sexuality a salient feature when navigating the labor market? Whether respondents believed their sexuality impacted their labor market experiences was dependent on: (1) respondents' beliefs about their chosen field's "ideal worker" and (2) respondents' ideas about gay men's ability to align with this image. The ideal worker image, then, operates as a cultural schema that shapes queer men's perceptions of both what it means to work in a given profession and how well queer men do or do not align with this image. Respondents who believed their field's ideal worker was explicitly not queer perceived a bright boundary surrounding their sexuality on the labor market, largely understanding their sexuality as something that may disadvantage them in their attempts to garner employment. Juxtaposed with this, respondents who did not believe that their sexuality would take on a negative symbolic significance in their chosen line of work conveyed no such boundary surrounding their sexuality on the labor market.

Past work finds that employers tend to hold negative views of queer men, labeling them as passive, effeminate, and weak, especially those employers in more masculine-typed occupations (Madon 1997, Connell 2005). This chapter highlights that queer men may internalize these cultural beliefs before even entering onto the labor market. Stereotypes played a central role in queer men's understanding of the labor market, both in regard to what it means to be a worker in a given line of work and how well others believe queer men align with this image. These stereotypes took on a particularly constraining character in the labor market sphere, shaping what queer men perceived of as salient. Cultural associations between an industry's ideal worker and certain identity groups work to make sexuality salient and consequential for those who believe their sexuality serves as a form of meaningful difference between themselves and their occupations ideal worker. All respondents who articulated a bright boundary surrounding their sexuality on the labor market understood their occupations ideal worker to either be a straight and hegemonically masculine man or a hegemonically feminine woman. Further, they understood their queer identity as something that made them sufficiently different from this ideal type, which could serve as the basis for disadvantage on the labor market. Past work has detailed that the ideal worker images are most often associated with particular identity characteristics

(Reid 2015, Ashcraft 2013, Ramajaran and Reid 2013). This chapter asserts that these associations and stereotypes influence the meaning that queer men attach to their sexuality on the labor market, working to brighten the boundary around queer sexuality for those who believe this to be inconsistent with their chosen occupation's ideal worker. These associations and stereotypes, however, were often reinforced and given weight through respondents' lived experiences, both in navigating hegemonically masculine spaces growing up and through their experiences in their major at college (i.e. seeing straight men favored by professors and given the leading roles). Boundary brightness, this chapter has shown, impacts not only how queer men think of the labor market but also the strategies they deploy their attempts to secure employment.

Stereotypes took on an equally constraining and yet slightly different character for queer Black men on the labor market. Aligning with past work (Remedios et al. 2011; Pedulla 2014), for those queer Black men interviewing at predominantly white work organizations, some noted purposefully signaling or disclosing their sexuality during their job interviews to both offset the stigma associated with their Black masculinity and appear as more competent. Yet, these perceived advantages for playing up one's sexuality seemed to be largely tied to particular industries. In industries such as theatre or dance, queer Black men did not report any such advantages for queer Black men. Rather, these identities only served to place them in a more constraining "box" where casting directors expected them to play into very particular stereotypes pertaining to straight Black men (i.e. hypermasculine, aggressive) or queer Black men (i.e. the funny sidekick). Thus, this chapter highlights not only that queer men's experiences on the labor market are deeply racialized but also that the stereotypes surrounding queer Black men's racial and sexual identities are often made more salient when securing employment and can be either constraining or enabling for securing employment, depending in large part on their chosen industry.

Past work has shown that cultural schemas and collective narratives shape behavioral patterns and individual-level decisions in impactful ways (West and Zimmerman 1987; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Ridgeway 2011; Cech 2013; Frye 2017). Cultural schemas, such as the ideal worker, and collective narratives that dictate that those best able to embody an industry's valued traits are best positioned to gain employment work to brighten or blur the symbolic significance that queer men attribute to their sexuality on the labor market. Aligning with past work (Frye 2017), this chapter contends that these cultural schemas and collective narratives operate as either constraining or enabling forces that shape individual's behavior and decisions. The distance that respondents saw between themselves and an occupation's ideal worker shaped the identity management strategies they utilized on the labor market. Those respondents who saw distance between themselves and the ideal worker responded to this distance by either disclosing or signaling their sexuality or by attempting to play up their masculinity in an attempt to mitigate the stigma attached to their sexuality. Queer respondents relied heavily on gender performances to either signal or cover their sexuality. Those men who reported wanting to signal their queer identity did so by relying on feminine presentation, such a wearing a mesh shirt, to signal their sexuality and assess organizational climate. Respondents who hoped to downplay their sexuality in their attempts to secure employment reported crafting masculine gender presentations, both in terms of their mannerisms and physical appearance.

Yet, not all respondents perceived any such distance between themselves and their industry's ideal worker image. In fact, 37 respondents reported no such distance. Though both those in the "Dimmed Boundaries" and "Never Bright" group reported no distance, their reasons for this were different. While those in the “Dimmed Boundaries” group believed that their sexuality aligned with their industry’s ideal worker, those in the “Never Bright” group saw sexuality as something entirely separate from the sphere of work and as something that would not meaningfully shape their experience in securing employment. Respondents in the “Never Bright” group held mostly meritocratic beliefs about the labor market, articulated little to no experience with discrimination or stigmatization on the basis of their sexuality, and reported little trouble or anxiety with navigating masculine and heteronormative environments. Those in the “Dimmed Boundaries” category did understand their sexuality as something that could serve as the basis for stigmatization and discrimination more broadly but chose to enter occupations that either had an explicit focus on helping queer populations or where the majority of workers were women and/or queer. Though for different reasons, respondents in both of these groups perceived a dim boundary surrounding their sexuality on the labor market largely because they did not see it as something that would meaningfully and consequentially shape their ability to gain employment.

This chapter speaks to the ways in which schemas and narratives both shape the experiences of queer men on the labor market and how they do so in ways that appear non-coercive. The ideal worker image creates an association between traits/identity characteristics and a successful worker in a given industry or occupation. Collective narratives dictate how queer men must act on the labor market to secure employment, highlighting that those queer men must align themselves with an industry’s or occupation’s ideal worker in order to successfully secure employment. The ideal worker image, then, works to brighten or blur the symbolic boundary surrounding one’s sexuality on the labor market, and cultural narratives provide the script for how to respond to this perceived distance. These abstract cultural representations compel queer men to engage in particular identity management strategies in their attempts to secure work, sometimes utilizing gendered performances as a mechanism for mitigating stigma or covering their sexuality on the labor market. Yet, few respondents noted actually having faced discrimination on the labor market (especially with regard to their sexual orientation) or noted that the gatekeepers at this stage (i.e. hiring managers or interviewers) acted in ways that made respondents believe their sexuality served as something that could disadvantage them. In fact, many respondents noted gaining benefits from disclosing their sexuality during their interviews, including respondents seeking employment in more masculine-typed occupations such as finance. Aligning with recent work (Frye 2017), this chapter highlights that actual representation within a given industry, cultural schemas, and prevailing narratives can sometimes compel queer men to engage preemptively in identity management strategies that feel constraining and inauthentic. Further, in attempting to best align with an industry's or occupations ideal worker, engaging in identity management strategies can work to uphold existing cultural schemas regarding an industry's ideal worker and also reinforce cultural narratives that dictate how best to act on the labor market to successfully secure employment in a given line of work.

CHAPTER 5

Navigating the Workplace: The Role of Context-Specific Cultural Capital

Identity, Sexuality and the Workplace

The context of the workplace is particularly consequential in reproducing and reifying inequality along categorical lines, given that most professional workplaces are characterized by an organizational culture that privileges white middle class men (Kanter 1997; Ragins and Cornwell 2001; Harvey-Wingfield 2010; Ridgeway 2011; Rios 2019; Smith-Doerr et al. 2019), Inequities that certain groups face in the workplace, such as lowered performance and status expectations, are often more covert than those faced in the labor market, as they most frequently take place during day-to-day interactions, are subtle in nature, and their effects accumulate over time (Kanter 1997; Schilt 2010; Harvey-Wingfield 2010; Ridgeway 2011; Smith-Doerr 2019). Though often subtle, these interactional biases have immense consequences, delineating access to advantageous networks, status within the workplace, and possibilities of upward mobility within work organizations (Harvey-Wingfield 2010; Ridgeway 2011). Past work has demonstrated that members of disadvantaged and stigmatized groups take up particular identity management strategies to counter these persistent biases and interactional inequities (Schilt 2006; Harvey-Wingfield 2007; Harvey-Wingfield 2010). For instance, members of marginalized groups engage in emotion work and identity negotiations so as to either contest or work within the stereotypes surrounding their identity groups (Hocschchild 1983; Harlow 2003; Ong 2005; Harvey-Wingfield 2007; Harvey-Wingfield 2010; Schilt 2010). For example, Black men may heavily regulate their emotions and expressions in the workplace to counter stereotypes surrounding Black masculinity as being hypermasculine and aggressive (Schilt 2010). Other work finds that Black women can also embrace stereotypes surrounding Black women in professional workplaces in order to gain respect from their colleagues (Ong 2005; Harvey-Wingfield 2007). The strategies that members of marginalized groups take up in the workplace, then, are largely contingent on the perceived disadvantages and advantages in their given organization.

Yet, how do individuals with less visible stigmatizing status characteristics navigate the workplace? Most work to date has scrutinized the strategies that women and people of color take up in the workplace, with less attention given to how queer workers navigate environments that are often heteronormative in nature (William and Guiffre 2010). Past work has detailed that queer workers regularly have to manage information pertaining to their sexuality in the context of the workplace and that this process of information management is both ongoing and emotionally challenging (Badgett 1995; Ward and Winstanley 2005). To avoid stigmatization, LGBT workers often choose to pass as straight or cover (i.e. downplay) their sexuality when in the workplace (Ward and Winstanley 2005; Yoshino 2006; Schilt 2010).

These identity management strategies, while emotionally taxing, may help to ward off discrimination and stigmatization within the workplace for queer workers (Ward and Winstanley 2005, Ragins 2008). Until recently, however, little was known about LGBT inequality in the workplace and the processes that undergird it (McFadden 2015). Utilizing “best case” organizations that are covered under non-discrimination legislation, emergent work highlights that LGBT workers in the federal government report worse treatment, less meritocratic work structures, and lower workplace satisfaction than their non-LGBT colleagues (Cech and

Rothwell 2020). Further, these processes were found to be deeply intersectional, with queer workers of color reporting worse outcomes on nearly every measure. These worse workplace experiences helped to explain LGBT respondents' higher turnover intentions—highlighting the role of interactional biases in reproducing larger systems of stratification.

One of the chief mechanisms disadvantaging queer men in the sphere of work are stereotypes labeling queer men as effeminate and weak (Madon 1997; Waite and Denier 2015). Queer men's perceived inability to embody and display hegemonic masculinity and thus align with the ideal worker image challenges their claims to authority, esteem, and respect at work (Berdahl et al. 2018). In fact, queer men tend to report worse workplace experiences in more heteronormative and male-dominated work organizations (Lyons et al. 2004; Parnell et al. 2012), where their sexuality stands in more sharp contrast to these work organizations' ideal worker image. Yet, given that queer men's perceived inability to align with hegemonically masculine ideals anchors much of their workplace inequities (Berdahl et al. 2018), the ability to successfully embody and perform hegemonic masculinity at work may also allow queer men to mitigate the stigma associated with their sexuality in the workplace.

Masculinity and Work

Hegemonic masculinity is largely valued throughout the workforce, with little variation along the lines of industry or occupation (Berdahl et al. 2018). Within the sphere of work, masculinity is associated with competency and ability, whereas femininity is associated with lowered performance expectations and less work commitment (Berdahl et al. 2018). Masculinity and proper displays of hegemonic masculinity carry symbolic value and operate as a form of cultural capital[8] in the workplace and often carry an economic exchange value, facilitating upward mobility, heightened performance evaluations, and inclusion in advantageous networks (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; Berdahl et al. 2018). In fact, successful displays of hegemonic masculinity help workers establish similarity with those in positions of power within work organizations, helping to facilitate upward mobility (Kanter 1977; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). Yet, not all workers are equally positioned to embody and display hegemonic masculinity, including women, men of color, and queer men.

Hegemonic masculinity serves to legitimate the hierarchical and complementary relationship between men and women (Schippers 2007). It is not only women, however, who are devalued by hegemonic masculinity but also men of color, poor men, and non-heterosexual men (Hill-Collins 2004). Through both processes of oppression and exclusion, gay men are positioned toward the bottom of the masculine hierarchy. This exclusion takes various forms: the use of homophobic slurs (Tomsen 2002), the policing of other men for acting feminine (Pascoe 2011), or exclusion in organizational settings (Tilcsik 2011). These processes of exclusion work to ensure the dominance and reproduction of hegemonic masculinity. Given the symbolic value placed on masculinity in the world of work and the perceived inability of queer men to embody it, the privileging of hegemonic masculinity may serve as a chief mechanism disadvantaging queer men in the workforce. Past work documents that those workers who are unable to embody hegemonic masculinity, such as queer men, are often tasked with adhering to very specific roles within their workplace, as they are expected to uphold and privilege hegemonic masculinity but not compete with straight white men for symbolic and material resources (Williams, Berdahl and Vandello 2016; Berdahl et al. 2018).

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[8] Following Ocampo (2012), I conceptualize cultural capital as the context-dependent behaviors, expressions, and tastes that are valorized and can be used to secure different forms of capital. Though Bourdieu (1984) and subsequent scholars conceptualized cultural capital as something that was used by those in power to differentiate themselves from and subordinate other groups, others (such as Carter (2005), Reich (2010), Ocampo (2012)) have argued that this conceptualization often ignores that members of socially marginalized groups also have cultural capital and can utilize this to secure capital and both symbolic and material resources in a given local context. Central to the argument of this chapter is that the expressions, mannerisms and tastes that come to be valorized for queer men (or operate as forms of cultural capital) are context-dependent and deeply racialized.

As noted by Hill-Collins (2004), hegemonic masculinity is not only defined through its opposition to femininity and gay men but also men of color. Hegemonic masculinity is deeply shaped by race (Hill-Collins 2004). Thus, the privileging of hegemonic masculinity may differently impact the workplace experiences of queer workers along racial lines. The same hegemonically masculine traits (aggressiveness, assertiveness, confidence) that advantage straight white men in the workplace are often those that work to disadvantage Black men in this realm (Harvey-Wingfield 2007; Schilt 2010). Given longstanding ideas labeling Black masculinity as threatening and criminal (Hill-Collins 1994), Black men are in a precarious position in predominantly white workplaces, where their masculinity is largely seen as threatening and that which necessitates control, leaving them largely unable to compete in masculinity contests in professional workplaces (Berdahl et al. 2018).

Yet, emergent research suggests that compared with straight Black men, queer Black men may be relatively advantaged in the sphere of work. Utilizing audit studies, Pedulla (2014) finds that compared to straight Black men, gay Black men are more likely to be hired and more likely to receive a higher starting pay. These results go against dominant trends in workplace studies, which posit that (white) gay men are less likely to be hired than straight men (Hebl et al. 2002; Tilcsik 2011) and that Black men are overwhelmingly less likely to be hired compared to their white counterparts (Pager 2003; Pager and Pedulla 2015). To explain this finding, Pedulla (2014) posits that gay Black men may be experiencing this hiring advantage due to the intersection of Black and queer masculinity, with queer masculinity offsetting the perceived threat of masculinity among white audiences. Less is known, however, about how queer Black men manage these competing expectations surrounding queer and Black masculinity once in the workplace. Though there has been little research on the work experiences of queer Black men, even less has been written about queer men of color who are not Black—namely queer men who identify as Hispanic, Asian, South Asian, and so on. Given cultural associations between Hispanic masculinity and hypermasculinity or "machismo" and Asian masculinity and femininity, it is likely that race is also salient and consequential in shaping the work experiences of non-Black queer men of color as well.

The Context of the Workplace

The workplace is "a central site for the creation and reproduction of gender differences and gender inequality" (Williams 1995, p. 15) due to the privileging of those traits associated with masculinity and the heightened pressure at work to align with gendered expectations (Prokos and Padavic 2002; Schilt 2006), which are also deeply racialized (Harvey-Wingfield 2007, Harvey-Wingfield 2010). Given that masculinity is a situated and ongoing accomplishment (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; Pascoe 2011; Berdahl et al. 2018), these gendered and racialized performances need to be continually negotiated in the context of the workplace. These performances are often crafted by anticipating others' reaction and adjusting accordingly (West and Zimmerman 1987; Yoshino 2006; Ragins 2008). Properly displaying and embodying hegemonic masculinity in the workplace leads to rewards, whereas an inability to do so can have detrimental impacts on workplace success and respect (Berdahl et al. 2018). Workers are constantly held accountable for their gender performances in the workplace and given the high stakes of not properly displaying or embodying hegemonic masculinity, workers have little agency in how they construct their gender performances in the workplace (Vandello et al. 2008; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; Berdahl et al. 2018). Even those who are devalued by the tenants of hegemonic masculinity are expected to adhere to, understand, and abide by the "rules of the game" while also not serving as a threat to the success of straight white men (Berdahl et al. 2018). For example, those with devalued identity characteristics often receive pushback for too strictly embodying hegemonic masculine traits and are seen as less likable for transgressing what is seen as socially appropriate (Schilt 2006; Berdahl et al. 2018).

Yet, the performances that are privileged can vary widely dependent on organizational and industry/occupational norms. Not all work organizations privilege masculinity equally. In fact, different work organizations in the very same industry or occupation can privilege very different gender performances and displays (Salzinger 2003). Displays of hegemonic masculinity have been found to be most privileged and pronounced in work organizations that are majority-men, both among workers and those in leadership positions (Berdahl et al. 2018; Smith-Doerr et al. 2019), most often heightened in finance, tech, and medical professions. Other work organizations—such as those with ideal workers that are not necessarily masculine or those with less stringent hierarchies and greater diversity—may be less likely to privilege displays of hegemonic masculinity, allowing workers in these occupations to display a range of identity management strategies (Williams and Guiffre 2010).

Relatedly, the meaning that queer sexuality takes on in the workplace is also largely context-specific (Ward and Winstanley 2005; Ragins 2008; Williams and Guiffre 2011). Although LGBT workplace inequality may be widespread throughout the United States workforce, there is likely great variation in the way queer workers experience their work organization, predicated in part on organizational contexts (Cech and Rothwell 2020). A number of factors can work to exacerbate or curtail inequalities that queer workers face in their workplace, including organizational culture, demographic representation, the existence of protective legislation and policy, and interactional norms (Bianchi, Kang and Stewart 2012; McFadden 2015; Cech and Rothwell 2020). The presence of queer co-workers may be especially impactful for queer workers, as having queer co-workers can help queer workers in finding social support and combating isolation brought on by tokenism (Ragins and Cornwell 2001; Ragins 2008; Willis 2010; Hebl, Tomidandel and Rugg 2012). Queer workers who feel supported and welcomed at work are more likely than those who do not to be open about their sexuality at work (Dovidio et al. 2000; Ward and Winstanley 2005; Ragins 2008; McFadden 2015). Those queer workers who feel as though their sexuality may challenge their claims to respect, inclusion, and success are more likely to engage in status management strategies that downplay their sexuality while at work, so as to circumvent any possible discrimination (Ward and Winstanley 2005; Yoshino 2006; Ragins 2008). Since work organizations most often have distinct cultures (Kunda 2009), it is likely that the workplace experiences of queer workers vary widely. Less is known about both how queer men differently experience the world of work and how these experiences may be shaped by their particular work context.

As demonstrated in previous chapters, respondents in this study entered into a wide array of occupations, ranging from theatre to engineering to finance to community organizing. Many men who entered into more masculine-typed occupations noted not having previously seen their sexuality as a meaningful and/or consequential axes of difference (a dim boundary). Juxtaposed with this, respondents who entered into more feminine-typed or predominantly queer industries/occupations most often did see their sexuality as something meaningful and/or consequential (a bright boundary). Yet, given that the extent to which hegemonic masculinity is privileged and queer sexuality is stigmatized varies by organization and occupation, the workplace may be a powerful boundary-shaping context. For instance, what significance do queer men attribute to their sexuality at work in contexts where hegemonic masculinity is less privileged? Further, how may working in organizations that privilege hegemonic masculinity shape the way those men who had not previously perceived seen their sexuality as meaningful and/or consequential think about and relate to their sexuality? Exploring this will illuminate both the fluid and contextual nature of our self-conceptions and the ways in which work can shape them.

The Gap

Thus far, extant work has established that (1) queer men's devaluation with regard to hegemonic masculinity serves as a chief mechanism of disadvantage for them in the workplace, challenging their claims to authority, respect, and inclusion at work, and (2) these processes of devaluation are heightened or attenuated by industry and occupation-specific characteristics. The gaps in the literature are threefold: first, we currently know less about the significance that queer men attribute to their sexuality once in the workplace and how this varies by occupation and industry. Second, though much work has attempted to unpack the identity management strategies queer men use in the workplace, we still know little about how the ways in which queer men experience the world of work is *racialized*. Lastly, though much work across a range of identity characteristics has begun to explore how our sexuality can shape work experiences and work-related decisions, less explored is how work impacts queer workers' self-conceptions and understandings of their sexuality. To date, scholarship has more enthusiastically taken up investigations of how our social identities shape our work experiences than of how our work experiences impact the ways in which we think about and relate to our various social identities. Emergent work has begun to explore this (Faulkner 2009; Cech 2013; Cech 2016; Seron et al. 2016), highlighting that work may indeed be central in shaping our self-conceptions. Given the fluid and contextual nature of identity (Green 2007; Moon 2008) and the central role that work takes on in the lives of contemporary Americans—including the long hours that we spend at work and the prevailing narrative that our work is a statement about who we are as individuals (Blair-Loy 2003; Reid 2015; Cech forthcoming)—work may indeed be a central site where struggles over identity and group identification are worked out. This chapter explores *why* may work be so central in shaping the way we understand and relate to our social identities.

Given these gaps, this chapter asks: What significance do queer men believe their sexuality takes on in the workplace, and how does this influence the strategies they use within it? Further, in what ways may queer men's experiences in the workplace shape their own understandings of their sexuality? Given the wide array of occupations that respondents entered into and the diversity among respondents surrounding how central they believe their sexuality was in structuring their lived experiences thus far, this chapter focuses on their experiences in the workforce to understand both what significance their sexuality takes on in this sphere and what may cause their sexuality and various other social identities to take on more or less symbolic significance in this sphere.

In this chapter, I argue that the way in which queer men understand and perform their sexuality in the workplace is dependent on (1) the context-specific valorized forms of cultural capital of the workplace and (2) which identity expressions are valorized in their work organization or line of work. Further, while extant work has documented that identities can influence our career decisions and work experiences, I find that work and what is valorized in this sphere can also shape queer men's self-conceptions and the symbolic significance that they attribute to their sexuality. It is important here to distinguish between professions and work organizations. Though work organizations are embedded within and deeply shaped by the field of professions in which they are embedded (Seron and Silbey 2009; Stainback, Tomaskovic-Devey and Skaggs 2010; Smith-Doerr et. al 2019), work organizations often have their own culture, logics, and practices (Baron and Bielby 1980; Reskin, McBrier and Kmec 1999; Smith-Doerr 2019). While cultural expectations surrounding the ideal worker of a given *profession* chiefly shaped respondents' experiences on the labor market, respondents' accounts of their work experiences largely centered on *organizational* logics and culture as key in determining the significance their sexuality or other social identities took on in the work sphere, with the notable exception of those working in performing arts and theatre.

This chapter focuses specifically on respondents' experiences in their various workplaces post-college. For this stage, interviews began with a broad discussion about their work experiences, including their job description, the work they engage in, typical workday activities, and relationships with co-workers and supervisors. Next, I would ask a set of questions about what it meant to be a successful worker in their work organization, who most often was seen as successful and why, and whether they believed that they are or could be successful in their current work organization. If respondents made note that their sexuality meaningfully impacted their experiences or claims to respect or success, I would ask a set of follow up questions exploring why they thought this to be true. If respondents made no note of their sexuality during these sets of questions, I would ask a follow up question asking if they ever felt their sexuality meaningfully impacted their work experiences and whether they believed their sexuality could or would serve as a basis for differential treatment. For respondents who noted that their sexuality was a salient feature of their work experiences, questions delved into if and how they responded to this in the context of the workplace. For respondents who did not believe their sexuality took on any significance in their work organization, questions centered on why they believed this to be the case.

This chapter begins with a discussion about the ways in which valorized forms of cultural capital was context-specific and how it varied across occupations as well as how respondents noted responding to their work organization's or industry's specific privileged forms of cultural capital. Next, I explore how these different forms of context-specific valorized forms of cultural capital impact the ways in which respondents manage their sexuality at work, delineating those who saw work as "brightening" with regard to their sexuality and those who saw work as "blurring," or as a sphere where they felt less constrained to enact their sexuality in specific ways. Lastly, I end with a discussion of how work shaped respondents' self-conceptions, focusing specifically on respondents in the "Brightened Boundaries" group, who noted their sexuality taking on a new symbolic significance once in the workforce, and respondents in the "Consistently Bright" category, who often noted that their experiences with work compelled them to more strictly embody and perform hegemonic masculinity both in and outside of work.

CONTEXT-SPECIFIC CULTURAL CAPITAL AND VALORIZED EXPRESSIONS AT WORK

Scholars have noted that whether certain identity characteristics, such as queer sexuality, take on a stigmatizing role in the workplace depends largely on the work environment (Dovidio et al. 2000; Ragins 2008). The work environment can shape not only whether a queer sexuality is seen as stigmatizing but also the strategies queer individuals take up within the workplace and how openly they feel they can express their sexuality at work (Ragins 2008). Ragins (2008) contends that three sources of support help to facilitate more free expression for queer workers:

(1) the presence of other queer workers, (2) positive relationships with non-queer co-workers, and (3) institutionalized support for queer workers. When combined, these environmental factors allow queer workers to feel comfortable in disclosing and expressing their sexuality at work. While these environmental factors may lead to a decrease in experiences with stigmatization for queer workers, they may not necessarily diminish the importance or salience of one's sexuality in the workplace. Even in workplaces that have all three sources listed above, queer workers may be subjected to certain role expectations on the basis of their sexuality. Role expectations—ideas about what a given person should do, act like, and think (Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Ridgeway 2011)—are both tied to particular identity characteristics and are often context-specific, predicated largely on what is valued in a given work organization. For queer men in my sample, the ways in which queer men thought about and negotiated their sexuality in the workplace was largely dependent on their work organizations context-specific valorized forms of cultural capital. I find that queer sexuality can be both salient and constraining even in organizations where other queer workers are present, where queer workers have positive interactions with non-queer co-workers, and in organizations with institutionalized support for queer workers. This finding highlights that even in work contexts that appear (and largely feel) inclusive toward queer workers, more subtle interactional and cultural norms shape both how queer workers understand their sexuality at work and the ways in which they navigate their workplace.

Cultural capital is context-specific (Ocampo 2012), and different work organizations valorize different expressions in the workplace. In some industries and workplaces, respondents noted that hegemonic displays of masculinity operate as a form of cultural capital. The privileging of hegemonic masculinity in these occupations and industries often meant that respondents simultaneously believed that their sexuality would serve as the basis for discrimination or stigmatization in their chosen line of work, meaning that open expressions of their sexuality and more feminine gender presentations and performances would likely hinder their potential success in their workplace or career more broadly. This was true across a variety of industries, ranging from more masculine-typed industries such as Tech to more stereotypically feminine or queer industries such as Theatre. For example, Mark (27, Asian, Public Health), who worked (but has since left) at a job in finance, reported feeling like he worked at a "boys club" where his sexuality and gender presentation served as a source of disadvantage, stating:

> The majority of them that I met, they're just exactly what... They're very Wolf of Wall Street types, which is awful. Just imagining myself as a feminine gay man trying to fit in there.

Mark articulates that his sexuality and feminine gender presentation stood in stark contrast to the more hegemonically masculine and heteronormative company culture. A similar narrative was echoed by Louis (white, 27), in theatre:

> Louis: I think being camped is very detrimental.
> Billy: What do you mean camped?
> Louis: So, like a feminine, very ...
> Billy: Over the top?
> Louis: Over the top, yeah. Like being too flamboyant and not being masculine. So if there's a role in a musical and the guys falls in love with a girl, they're not gonna pick me, if I'm flamboyant or feminine or anything like that. 'Cause it just doesn't tell the story right. So, being masculine and coming across heterosexual would work in my favor.

As Louis notes, masculinity and heterosexuality is also privileged in theatre, where an inability to align with these ideals challenges an actor's ability to book roles and secure employment.

Juxtaposed with the narratives above, some respondents in the "Dimmed Boundaries" group noted queerness actually operating as a form of cultural capital in their occupation/industry, such as those working in queer-related research or those working in predominantly queer workplaces. Respondents here noted that a range of gendered or sexuality performances were valorized in their workplace and that most jokes and references were often related to queer media or entertainment. For example, Rohan (26, South Asian, Social Work) notes feeling free to present and act in ways that feel authentic to him:

> Rohan: it was like nice that all of my coworkers were trans or queer or gender nonconforming or just very on the pulse about like queerness. I mean obviously because that's the population that you have to be.
> Billy: And why was that so nice?
> Rohan: 'Cause you can just act the way that you wanna act as opposed to like posturing or like code switching. Like I never felt that I had [perform] when I worked there.

Other respondents, predominantly those in the "Brightened Boundaries" group, also noted that their queerness operated as a form of cultural capital in their workplace, though their narratives differed from those in the "Dimmed Boundaries" group in important ways. Those in the "Brightened Boundaries" group noted encountering workplace cultures that strongly encouraged them to not only openly perform their queer identity but also to do so in ways that aligned with stereotypical images surrounding white, middle-class, queer men. While openly identifying as "gay" was encouraged in these organizations, the range of expressions for expressing this identity were more constricted than for those working in predominantly queer work organizations—with respondents in this group noting feeling pressure to fit into a specific box with regard to their presentation and gender performances at work. Whereas respondents in predominantly queer organizations were not seen as distinct for being queer, respondents in this group noted that their sexuality both made them distinct in their workplace and came with both social and even economic rewards. In fact, those working in finance reported gaining benefits from "playing up" their queer identity in the workplace. Take Henry (white, 49, Finance):

> I think the key thing is, for my career, the journey of: "not sure this is right, this is going to be very bumpy" to "it could actually help me get promoted." I probably won't get promoted. But the fact that we are very focused on having more diverse management, being gay could even help me, instead of being a hindrance.

Henry notes that his queer identity may actually help open up advancement opportunities for him at work. He went on to add:

> Henry: I'm like, maybe my age, weight, and gayness will put me on some protected list, where I can't get fired. I'm not going to count on that.
> Billy: There's no tenure?
> Henry: No.
> Billy: Oh, okay. Interesting.
> Henry: No. We have ... not that we're the only firm that does this, but, consistently, the rumor is, the bottom 10% goes every year. So just don't be in the bottom 10%. How do you do that? Work really hard, be very *visible*, and put up results.

Henry notes that being visible helps in not getting fired. As he noted above, one such way to do this is by playing up his queer identity. Similarly, Alejandro (24, Hispanic), who works on wall street, conveyed that his sexuality allows him to stand out and impress others at work:

> Billy: And how was it being gay [at your organization]?
> Alejandro: It was great. It makes you stand out, where it sounds weird, but it's something you're looking for when you're trying to impress people.

Yet, this "acceptance" came with a set of expectations for what a gay man should act like in the work organization. In discussing the dilemmas gay men face in finance with regard to representation, Alejandro articulated the expectations he was met with as a gay-identifying man:

> "Okay, you're gay? Cool, so this is the kind of things that you have to like, and this is the way you have to behave. So you're not going to like sports, you're not going to like this."

Alejandro highlights that though his sexuality may come with some professional benefits, he is expected to align with and embody a very specific and narrow idea of what it means to be a queer man. Further, these performances were deeply racialized. Alejandro notes that though queer workers may receive certain advantages from making their sexuality salient, this does not operate similarly for racial/ethnic minority workers:

> Billy: Yeah, that’s really interesting. And so what it’s sounding like is for racial minorities, there’s like this pressure to blend in, but for gay people there’s this incentive to stand out.
> Alejandro: Yeah.
> Billy: Why do you think there’s such a difference?
> Alejandro: I think one, because most gay people, at least in these companies, are white, so they fit in all their lives, so they don’t have that problem. And two, I think it’s just that they’re in New York City. They know that at the end of the day, people here are very open. I don’t know, you stop seeing being gay as a liability.

Although most respondents noted that their workplace or chosen industry and the context-specific cultural capital valorized within it dictated the significance that their sexuality took on at work, this differed along racial lines. Specifically, aside from those working in the performing arts, all but one Black respondent noted that their queer identity operated as a form of cultural capital in their work organization, irrespective of their occupation or industry. This point will be elaborated on further later in this chapter.

To summarize, the symbolic significance that a respondent’s sexuality took on in their work organization was largely predicated on their industry’s or occupation’s context-specific valorized forms of cultural capital and whether queer sexuality operated as one such form. Past work has demonstrated that organizational contexts and demographic compositions can mitigate or amplify inequalities faced by queer workers (Ragins 2008; Cech and Rothwell 2020), but less attention has been paid to exactly *why* these factors shape the workplace experiences of queer workers. This chapter highlights that work organizations and industry cultures valorize different forms of cultural capital, some of which valorize queer identities and some of which devalue them. These context-specific forms of cultural capital shaped the ways in which queer men in this sample thought about the importance and significance that their sexuality took on in their work organization. The next section explores how these different forms of cultural capital shaped the identity management strategies queer men took up in the workforce.

NAVIGATING THE WORKFORCE: CULTURAL CAPITAL AND IDENTITY PERFORMANCES

Thus far, this chapter has highlighted that the symbolic significance that queer sexual identities take on in the workforce is varied and is chiefly tied to the context-specific capital of a work organization or an industry more broadly. But how does context-specific cultural capital impact the ways in which queer men negotiate their sexuality in the workforce? This section is broken up into two parts, work as brightening and work as blurring, delineating the different ways in which context-specific cultural capital shapes queer men's perceived boundary surrounding their sexuality at work. As this section will show, whether queer men saw work as brightening or blurring shaped the ways in which they navigated their workplace and the workforce more broadly.

Work as Brightening

31 respondents reported work as brightening, meaning that they believed their sexuality meaningfully impacted their experiences in the workforce and served as a meaningful and sometimes consequential axes of difference for them in this sphere. All respondents in this group fall into either the "Brightened Boundaries" or "Consistently Bright" groups. For these respondents, their sexuality became brightened in the context of the workplace, largely because the ideal worker in their work organization or industry was both straight and masculine and because hegemonic masculinity operated as the most privileged form of cultural capital. Yet, the ways in which queer men responded to this were predicated on what expressions or identity performances were valued from them in these spaces or what role expectations surrounded queer men in these organizations. As I will demonstrate, though all men who fell into this category worked in organizations or industries that privileged hegemonic masculinity, not all expected or even valued these expressions from queer men.

Respondents in the "Consistently Bright" group noted both that their sexuality meaningfully influenced their experiences in the workforce and that hegemonic masculinity served as the dominant form of cultural capital in their line of work. Given their industry's perceived masculine and straight ideal worker, displays of masculinity were tied to ideas about competency and professionalism. Thus, in order to be successful in their chosen line of work, respondents in this category reported playing up their masculinity while at work. Take for example Mark (27, Asian, Public Health) who, when asked about how working in a masculine work environment impacted him, responded:

> Mark: I was uncomfortable a lot of times. I've grown up around straight dudes all my life. I played basketball in high school. I knew what made them comfortable, to be comfortable with me.
> Billy: Which one was that?
> Mark: It's just like being in the boys club…I couldn't at times. I will never forget. We had an important meeting. It was an executive meeting. All the executives were there, and I had to lead an hour presentation about this is our new contracting strategy, blah, blah, blah. I was wearing a full suit, data presentation, killed it. It was amazing. I got a raise a week after. It was fucking awesome. I sweated through my shirt. Went to the bathroom after and just literally sat on the toilet and just breathed heavily for five minutes because I was so exhausted. I thought I was going to have a breakdown…yeah, when you're stuck in an airplane for hours and hours and hours, and then you eventually get off. You're like, "Ooh, you get to stretch." That's what it feels like every time, going through a meeting with these dudes.
> Billy: And that's because of the way you've had to present yourself?
> Mark: Yeah, yeah. It truly is. *I think that there is something to these guys about physical affect. It's a lot of energy to keep it up for a long period of time.*

Mark notes having to align with more hegemonically masculine ideals while at work to be seen as a professional and that these encounters were often exhausting both because of how much work he put in to crafting these presentations/performances and his general discomfort around straight-identifying men. These identity negotiations were largely constrained by the perceived consequences of not doing so. Respondents in the "Consistently Bright" group did this because not doing so, they believed, could result in lowered performance expectations, limited success in their profession, and even unemployment. Max (25, Hispanic), for example, works at a consulting firm where most of the workers and nearly all of management are straight-identifying white men. At work, he notes acting more "serious" and "masculine" at work, by lowering his voice and wearing more subdued colors. When asked why he engages in these identity negotiations at work, he responded:

> When you go into a meeting…when you meet with clients, you go in as a team. The team is mostly straight men. The clients are mostly straight men. You want to…you want to stand out in the good ways but not in the bad ways, not too much. You want to seem like a good member of the group. Because when you go into a client meeting, you go in with a group. And at that time, *you want to make sure you look like part of that group.*

Here, Max notes that if he were to not properly align with or embody masculinity, he would stand out in his job in ways that he believes would be disadvantageous, To be a successful member of his work team, he notes, means looking and acting like a member of that group—a group comprised of almost all straight-identifying men.

Thus, for men in this group, masculinity operated a form of cultural capital with exchange value. Possessing this sort of capital was necessary, they believed, in order to succeed in their chosen profession. Properly displaying and embodying masculinity was believed to lead to greater career opportunities, more secure employment, and higher performance expectations. Yet, in order to "properly" perform and embody hegemonic masculinity, respondents believed that they had to work to not come across as gay—articulating an understanding that being gay serves and impediment to being seen as masculine. Given the symbolic value of masculinity in their occupations and industries, respondents in this group noted that their sexuality was something that both could disadvantage them in the workforce and that this stigma needed to be managed through carefully curated gender performances.

Yet, in other professions where the ideal worker is straight and masculine, other respondents reported benefiting from playing up and making salient their sexuality at work. Respondents in this group noted that queer men in their work organization are encouraged, by both their colleagues and supervisors alike, to be "out" at work and align themselves very closely with stereotypical images of what it means to be a gay, white, middle class man.

> Alejandro: There's actually, I'm not even kidding, there's a group called ... I mean not officially, but people call them the Golden Gays.
> Billy: The Golden Gays?
> Alejandro: And it's funny because they're like the mean girls of [my firms] gays, yeah.
> Billy: Really? So what are they like?
> Alejandro: I don't know, very muscled, care always about fashion, looking good. Very loud presence.
> Billy: So would you say that even the gay men in finance tend to be more masculine?
> Alejandro: No, *I would say the contrary actually.*
> Billy: Oh okay.
> Alejandro: Because I guess if you're out and you're using being gay, like I said, you end up looking for things to differentiate yourself. And if your sexuality's something that you're going for, the more different you are the better, in that sense. Like if that's your goal in that sense, then yeah. So I would think they're not.
> Billy: Interesting. And so why is it important ... Let's say I'm in [your firm], and I'm new, and I'm gay, why would it be important for me to be open to differentiate myself?
> Alejandro: Just there's so many people. Everybody's smart, everybody comes from a good school. So you need something. Like your work is not going to be enough. You need a lot of people to support you, and you need to make a presence of yourself.

Similar to earlier in the chapter, Alejandro notes that at his work organization (1) queer men who embody specific forms of queerness have access to advantageous resources at work, and (2) these forms of queerness are very narrow and entail those traits most commonly associated with upper middle class white gay men. These respondents believed that given their organizations push for diversity and inclusion (especially around LGBTQ issues), their sexuality (if properly performed) allowed them to both stand out and seem more valuable to their organization.

> Billy: But it’s not only standing out, right? Because you’re standing out in a good way it sounds?
> Alejandro: Yeah. That’s the thing, it’s like.. you know, I guess if you’re a good performer, and you know the company’s trying to get people to be more supportive. I don’t know, it’s a lot of factors. It’s like..if I’m a manager and I know I have a very good gay person, and everybody loves that gay person, and that person is a good performer, I’m going to look good for promoting a minority.

Alejandro notes that queer men who both stand out and are well-liked likely have better chances of advancing in his work organization. Further, their sexuality gave them access to advantageous social networks that they would not otherwise have access to, which could help them find other employment and gave them access to advantageous work resources. Yet, aligning with the narrative of Henry, these respondents working in organizations where specific performances of queerness operates as a form of capital noted that they did not feel like they were free to “be themselves” at work, but rather, they felt pressure to play up their queer identity (and femininity) in order to accrue the advantages that come with it. Thus, for men in the “Brightened Boundaries” category, their queer sexuality served as a form of cultural capital with exchange value. It allowed them access to advantageous networks and job security. Yet, this also meant reifying stereotypical notions of what it meant to be a queer man.

This pressure to “play up” one’s queer identity or femininity while at work was expressed by not only some respondents working in masculine-typed occupations but also many queer men of color in my sample who were working in predominantly white work organizations. Although this was articulated by many men of color in my sample, Black respondents conveyed a heightened sense of pressure to engage in these identity performances in the workplace. Black respondents understood that their racial identity was associated with cultural ideas about hypermasculinity, hypersexuality, and threat in white work organizations. For example, Stanley

(26, Black, STEM) notes understanding these prevailing cultural assumptions and working to combat them:

> With Blackness, if you're perceived to be a certain way, there's just a lot of ... I don't want to use the word programming, but there's again, a lot of internalized anti-Blackness, things that we have been taught about Black people and through stereotypes and just the way that we are. Black people get shot for being a little bit hostile. Black people get the cops called on them for raising their voice and saying, hey, this is fucked up. So you just know to not poke the bear sometimes and just say, okay. This is what it is. I'm just going to turn everything down. I'm going to be cool and docile and nonthreatening.

Stanley notes that due to cultural ideas and stereotypes surrounding Blackness, he feels pressure to respond to unjust treatment in ways that will not make his white co-workers feel uncomfortable or threatened. In contrast to the narratives offered by queer white men in masculine-typed occupations, Black men reported no such benefits on the basis of their racial identity, resulting in vastly different identity negotiations at work.

Given the perceived threat surrounding their racial identity, Black respondents articulated a belief that their sexuality made them more palatable or relatable to their white coworkers. For example, as Sheldon (Black, 25, Higher Education Administration) notes:

> Well, let me put it this way, in some ways I'm concerned that my queerness and my lack of extreme masculinity makes it easy for folks, like I said, to infantilize me and to make it seem like I'm a child. It's also funny because for some people, particularly women I work with, *I think some of those traits actually make me more accessible to them*. We actually are able to work more closely because I think in some ways, we don't say this explicitly, but we bond over ... I think what they're feeling is a bond or an attraction to *not* [toxic] masculinity. They see a man who is respectful and nice or whatever and competent, but who is friendly and who's not some ... not like their ex-husband who abused them. I think in some ways they find that to be a comforting thing. *It's funny balancing the recognition that in some ways, the queerness and my Blackness and my more than not feminine queerness can be an asset in some regards to some people, but recognizing that at the same time for some people it definitely is a hindrance*. Those two things are just together.

Sheldon notes that his sexuality and gender presentation likely make him seem less threatening to his coworkers. Black respondents regularly reporting believing being seen as relatable or likable by coworkers because, in part, their queer identity served to offset the perceived threat surrounding their Black masculinity. This aligns with past work that finds that queer Black men are more likely to be hired and paid higher starting wages when compared to gay white men and straight Black men, likely due to ideas surrounding masculinity, sexuality, and race (Pedulla 2014). This chapter extends that work by demonstrating that although queer Black men may be seen as more relatable by their white co-workers and supervisors given their intersectional location, it is less of an “intersectional freedom” (Ridgeway and Katz 2013) than it is a source of constraint for them in the context of the workplace. Black respondents noted having to engage in particular identity negotiations in the context of the workplace in order to accrue advantages and avoid stigmatization. Instead of serving as an “intersectional freedom,” the desire to be seen as likable or amicable served as what Feinstein (2017) refers to as an “intersectional incentive” or the “motive associated with the social norms and expectations which are unique to one’s intersectional location and include the advantages of adhering to one or more institutions of domination and oppression” (p. 549). These “intersectional incentives” often require “intersectional tactics” to increase benefits and mitigate penalties associated with their various social identities (Feinstein 2017). For example, Marcus (Black, 26, Secretary at Law Office) noted “leveraging femininity” while at work in order to be seen as relatable and competent at work.

> I am acutely aware of self-comportment, so I know how to *leverage my femininity to convey that I am non-threatening*. So, I have to ensure, like don't be too masculine because then I will read as aggressive. And I'm constantly aware of that. And I think I've been aware of that ... I think I've been doing this subconsciously probably since I was as teenager. It's also a part of me, but now I know there are certain ways that I’ll move my body, I’ll position myself, because

> typically we associate femininity with a demure stance, like ... What is it? Shrinking yourself?

When I asked him to describe how he would leverage femininity, he replied:

> Marcus: So, I know I can do things like this or cross my legs, basically to keep people at ease. Yeah.
> Billy: So, you're saying that you leverage femininity to keep people at ease.
> Marcus: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
> Billy: Do you find yourself doing that more so in white spaces or is it, it's held constant?
> Marcus: No. *It's usually white spaces*. Yeah. I would definitely say my femininity is again an integral part of myself. And it's who I am when I'm talking with other Black gay men, just chilling and just laughing and joking. *But there's a deliberate way with which I code-switch to navigate white spaces*. Yeah.
> Billy: What do you think is specific about white spaces?
> Marcus: *The looming stereotype threat. Making sure that I get the best advantages.*

Marcus reports "leveraging femininity" when in his white work spaces so as to offset the perceived threat associated with Black masculinity. Further, he notes doing this because of the professional advantages he may have access to for doings so. Black respondents and some Hispanic respondents believed that their queerness was more valorized than their racial identity in their workplace, irrespective of occupation or industry of employment. This resulted in some queer men of color attributing greater symbolic significance to their sexuality than they had previously—now seen as something that could curtail discrimination and open up opportunities for mobility and advancement—and feeling a need to negotiate their racial and sexuality in unique ways in the context of their workplace.

Work as Blurring

Respondents in this category mostly fall into the "Dimmed Boundaries" group. 20 respondents reported work as "blurring", meaning that work was a sphere where the boundary or symbolic significance surrounding their sexuality was diminished. This was largely due to the field in which they were employed. More specifically, the diversity in valorized expressions and diversity in representation in their work organizations made it so that queer respondents in this group did not feel as though they had to negotiate their sexuality in any particular ways or that it served as a consequential axes of difference in their workplace. Respondents in this group all worked in work organizations that were either predominantly queer or were predominantly comprised of women. Respondents noted that this representation at work made them feel freer to express themselves in ways that they desired. For example, Sebastian (Hispanic, 28, Public Health), after noting having only ever worked in organizations that are predominantly queer, went into further detail about what these spaces offer him:

> Billy: Do you think there are any advantages to working in predominately queer workplaces?
> Sebastian: Oh yeah. I would never, I don't even know how I would react or act at a place that is mostly straight.
> Billy: What do you mean?
> Sebastian: I don't know, I would feel very, I mean for me, I would feel very uncomfortable. Because I'm…very open and I talk about a lot, so I feel like in the workplace, it could be more difficult to be yourself when you're surround by people who are not gay, or whatever. *I mean, basically because of my experiences with all these straight people since I was little, I'm like, "Oh they're going to kill [me]."* I mean, obviously that's not going to be like that, but I think that for me it would be uncomfortable.
> Billy: So what do you think that you're able to do in queer workplaces, or say or act, that you probably wouldn't if you're in a straight workplace?
> Sebastian: I would never talk about my relationship or my partner, nothing. I'd be like, "Hey. Bye, Susanna." That's it. I would never, I mean I don't have to say I'm gay because obviously people are going to assume it, but I would never talk about it if I don't feel comfortable.

Sebastian articulates that predominantly queer workplaces allow him to act authentically without worrying about potential consequences of being made to feel different or uncomfortable.

Further, many respondents in the "Dimmed Boundaries" group reported that queerness, and expressions of queerness were affirmed and valorized in their work organizations. For example, Rohan (South Asian, 26, Social Work) noted how working in a predominantly queer organization differs from working in a mostly straight environment:

> It’s like you feel, I feel like when you're in a straight work environment, you notice how queer you are. It’s almost like when I go visit my mom, I notice how gay I am, even though it's just my norm, because I have to posture a certain way when I go back home. It’s like, “Oh. What the fuck?"

Above, Rohan notes that predominantly straight work environments highlight that queer sexuality serves as a meaningful axes of difference, which is something that is not salient for him when working in predominantly-queer work organizations.

Yet, these expressions of queerness differed from those in the “Brightened Boundaries” group in that they were less confined or constricted. Respondents in the “Dimmed Boundaries” group reported being free to act as they wanted, whereas those in the “Brightened Boundaries” group reported having to fit a very narrow and often stereotypical definition of what it means to be a (white and middle-class) queer man. In fact, respondents in this group articulated not having to really think about their sexuality while at work, mostly due to the lack of representation of straight-identifying men in their workplace, and the lack of valorization surrounding hegemonic displays of masculinity. Given the general lack of a boundary surrounding their sexuality at work, men in this group reported not having to engage in any particular identity negotiations at work. Rather, these respondents reported being able to act authentically while at work, where ideas about what it meant to be a professional were not tied to ideas about queerness.

WORK AS IDENTITY-SHAPING

Most work surrounding identity and work has detailed the ways in which one’s identity or self-conception impacts career-related decisions (Charles and Bradley 2009, Cech 2013), often working to uphold and reproduce larger patterns of occupational segregation and disparities in wages and power. Less explored are the ways in which one’s career may shape or even change their self-conceptions and the ways in which they think of their various identities. The above section detailed that the ways in which queer men navigated their workplace was chiefly predicated on the context-specific capital of their workplace and the expressions that are valorized within it. This section delves into how respondents' work and the cultural capital valorized in their occupation or industry shaped the symbolic significance they attributed to their sexuality, both within and outside of work. I focus on two groups in this section who noted their experiences at work shaping their self-conceptions as queer men—those in the "Brightened Boundaries" and those in the "Consistently Bright" group.

As noted in earlier chapters, respondents in the "Brightened Boundaries" group did not believe that their sexuality influenced their career-related decisions, either directly or indirectly. Yet, they believed that it took on a new meaning once they entered into the workforce and that their experiences at work changed the way in which they thought about and related to their sexuality. For these respondents, their sexuality began to take on a new meaning for them largely because of the expectations of those that they worked with that they either tone down their sexuality or align themselves with stereotypical notions of what it means to be a queer man. Take, for example, Henry (white, 49, Finance). He noted that his career decisions were not at all influenced by his sexuality and that it was not a central component to his self-conception prior entering into the workforce. He did not even disclose his sexuality at his first job, but, as expressed below, the benefits associated with his sexuality changed the way in which he thought about his queer sexuality:

> Henry: I don't think that would be the hindrance to making MD. I don't. In fact, dare to dream, it might help, because we've got a massive diversity initiative going on, and as we speak, our CEO sent out an email today, saying, "We need more diverse leadership." *I'll play that card, if it'll make me more money. Hell yeah.*
> Billy: This is so interesting to hear, because even talking to people who are in not as masculine occupations, you don't hear about these diversity initiatives in the way that you hear about them in these big organizations. Why do think that there is this push for diversity?

> Henry: We have a lot of headline risk. [My firm] is in the headlines in the Journal several times a week. This week there's been a ton of articles, because of our earnings announcement, because of our CEO announcing his retirement. A lot of eyes follow the biggest firms.

Henry notes "playing that card," meaning playing up a stereotypically queer identity at work to accrue work resources and benefits. Similarly, Max notes how work altered the way that he thought about and related to his sexuality. Yet, juxtaposed with Henry, Max (Hispanic, 25, BioTech Consulting) worked in an organization where masculinity was valorized, which fostered a belief that his sexuality could serve as the basis for stigmatization. He notes being excluded from advantageous informal gatherings:

> Max: There are things [at work] I get frustrated with. For example, some of the VPs will go to like a strip club, for example, and they won't invite me because I'm the gay guy. So it's a lot of comments and stuff like that. Obviously I think it's stupid they are appending money going to strip clubs. I don't really want to go. But they extended an invitation to my colleague who just joined, and he's a 6 -foot-tall white Princeton lacrosse player. It's those kinds of things.
> Billy: Why are those gatherings important?
> Max: I mean, it's always a good networking opportunity. I mean, at the holiday party last year I sat next to a VP's wife and we got drunk and she loved me. And that made him [the VP] like me even more. You need to always think about the next level on the job. *It's not just about like..your performance, because obviously you need to have an advocate. And you only get advocates when they like you*. It needs to extend beyond the job requirements, I would say.

As Max notes, rather than coming to see his sexuality as an asset or a resource for mobility at work, he learned that it likely served to disadvantage him in making important informal connections that may lead to advancement. For men in the "Brightened Boundaries" group, queer identity became an organizing feature of work for them largely because of (1) the rewards they received that they believed were tied to specific identity performances, such as opportunities for advancement and increases in pay, (2) access to advantageous networks, and/or (3) the potential disadvantages or stigmatization that was tied to their sexuality. Though respondents in the "Brightened Boundaries" group all noted not believing their sexuality to be a consequential axes of difference earlier on in their lives, especially when making career decisions, their experiences in the workforce lead them to perceive a bright boundary surrounding their sexuality, which they saw as either an asset or a disadvantage.

Work also shaped the ways in which some queer men of color thought about their various identities. The vast majority of Black respondents and over half of Hispanic respondents noted that their racial identity took precedence over their sexuality with regard to which identity they saw as more important to their self-conceptions and consequential for how others perceived and treated them. Further, as noted in Chapter 3, most queer men of color also noted that their racial identity was far more influential in structuring their career decisions than their sexuality. Yet, once in the workforce most queer men of color in my sample noted their sexuality playing a consequential role in structuring their experiences in their workplaces—contending a need to play up their sexuality and/or "leverage femininity" when in predominantly white workplaces in order to mitigate the stigma and perceived threat associated with their racial identity. For queer men of color, the sphere of work was consequential in shaping the symbolic meaning they attributed to their racial and sexual identities. For example, when asked how his experiences at work may differ from a Black man who identifies as straight, Daniel (Black 31, tech) notes playing to his audience of predominantly white women on his team and highlighting his sexuality to come across as more relatable:

> So it's interesting. Part of me feels like if you are gay, you can make a bunch of "Sex in the City" jokes and become less threatening as a Black man. You know? And there's a lot of women in my..I hate to stereotype, but there's a lot of women on my team and sometimes I feel like..well, if I'm like "Hey girl!" and like "I love your shoes!' and gay-it-up I can diffuse the Black-man-threat.

Although Daniel had not previously given weight to his sexuality in his career narrative, he notes that his sexuality became more important for him in navigating his predominantly white workplace, allowing him to be seen as more relatable to his white co-workers. For these queer men of color, the context-specific cultural capital of their work organizations brightened the boundary surrounding their sexuality, compelling these men in my sample to attribute a greater symbolic significance to their sexuality than they previously had.

Work also shaped the self-conceptions of respondents in the "Consistently Bright" group, though in markedly different ways than it did for those in the "Brightened Boundaries" group. Respondents in the "Consistently Bright" group noted that their sexuality was important in structuring their career-related decisions and their experiences in securing employment; so how did their experiences with work reshape the ways in which they understood the significance attributed to their sexuality? For those in this group, work did not diminish or exacerbate how important their sexuality was to their self-understanding, but it did influence the ways in which they performed their gender and sexual identities both in and outside of work, often resulting in these respondents attempting to embody and perform hegemonic masculinity in ways that would allow them to believably pass as straight. Given that many of the men in this group were working in theatre and dance, they were met with both narrow and constraining ideas of what a man should look, sound, and move like in order to be successful and land roles. Most often, respondents noted that success was predicated on one's ability to be able to believably play straight-identifying characters. Chris (white, 28, Theatre) notes the difficulty of being queer in theatre, largely because of a perceived inability for queer men to play a straight, hegemonically masculine character.

> Billy: Did you find that it's harder for gay men to get cast as leading men than it is for straight men in musical theater?
> Chris: Oh 100%. Yeah. I feel like now on Broadway, it's like that all the time. You'll get that straight man role, who the actor is clearly very straight, but isn't the best singer and we forego that because he's really believable as a straight man, but we don't get the opposite. It's always a straight man playing the gay character.

> Billy: Oh true. Yeah. Yeah.
> Chris: Yeah I feel... I don't know, I guess I didn't realize how gay I was, rather how I acted until I was called out for it…I think it's harder to a degree, *I think there's many gay men who can act the shit out of parts and be very convincing as straight men. I just think, based on what we know about them already, it's harder for us to suspend the disbelief rather than we go in there thinking they're straight men, right?*

Chris notes that it is not necessarily queer men's inability to play straight that prevents them from being cast as straight men, but rather, the *assumptions* that casting directors make once they believe a man to be gay operate as the primary barrier for getting cast in these parts. Respondents in theatre or performing arts noted that being read as queer could challenge their ability to be seen as someone who could believably play a straight character. In order to present as someone who could play straight-identifying and masculine characters, respondents in this group noted having to spend considerable time in the gym to bulk up, learn to constrain their movements while dancing so as to not appear flamboyant or effeminate, learn to lower their voice when talking, and even becoming less animated while speaking, as noted by Samuel (white, 22, Theatre):

> Samuel: I think changed my voice. Not necessarily lowered, 'cause there are plenty of straight guys with high pitched voices.
> Billy: Right. In what ways have you changed your voice?
> Samuel: I think from what I've learned and studied, gay guys use a lot of upward inflection. That's also what you use when you're not as confident. So then, that's a whole thing. I guess you could be like, "Gay men aren't as confident because society hates them." Who knows?

Samuel notes spending considerable time and energy in getting his voice to sound more like that of a stereotypically straight-identifying man. Other respondents, such as Terry (Black/white, 26, Theatre/Dance), noted not only changing their voice but also their bodies. Terry notes how having to pass as straight is something that often requires cultivation:

> Terry: I know that things aren't always the easiest if you can't even slightly pass for straight. And not that femininity means you're not straight. But there are

> definitely gay men that have a more, I don't even, not stereotype. They just they don't embody what people imagine when they think of masculinity. And so, moving in that way doesn't come as naturally. Or look as natural on them. So, those kinds of things are harder.

When asked how to embody masculinity, he replied:

> Terry: Yeah, I mean definitely a muscle is a thing. It’s definitely seen as more feminine if you’re lankier. And long limbed, you’re kind of expected to be muscular and defined to play masculine roles so…

To more believably come across as masculine, Terry notes working to “embody” masculinity, cultivated by building muscle. This was not something that respondents in this group turned on and off as they entered and left work, but rather, it was something that followed them in everyday life. Respondents in theatre and dance noted engaging in efforts to present as masculine in everyday life so that they would not have to adjust much in rehearsals or during performances, facilitating a more seamless and natural transition between work and non-work spheres.

As noted in earlier chapters, respondents in the “Consistently Bright” category were led into their line of work through their earlier experiences with stigmatization on the basis of their sexuality. Almost all respondents in theatre and dance noted experiencing bullying in junior high and high school by straight men because of their actual or perceived queer sexuality. These men found their “safe space” in theatre and dance, where they experienced affirmation and an escape from the bullying they encountered elsewhere. Yet, both in their attempts to secure employment and even after securing work, these respondents were faced with a harsh reality: most of the roles in theatre and dance are for straight-identifying characters, and many of those roles are written as masculine-presenting. Given that many casting directors were skeptical of queer men’s ability to “play straight”, queer respondents in my sample noted consistently being denied roles that eventually went to straight-identifying men or, on rare occasions, queer men who were better able to embody hegemonic masculinity and pass as straight. In order to secure employment and succeed in their chosen occupation, queer respondents in theatre and dance had to learn to cultivate a more masculine image and gender performance in order to be seen as being able to play straight. Thus, though these respondents were led into theatre and dance because it offered them a space for self-expression and affirmation, they were forced to align more closely with tenants of hegemonic masculinity in order to secure employment and succeed in their chosen industry.

CONCLUSION

Whether the boundary surrounding respondent's sexuality was brightened or blurred in the workforce was predicated on the industry's or work organization's context-specific valorized forms of cultural capital. Context-specific cultural capital delineated a work organization's symbolic currency, shaping what expressions and identity performances were and were not valorized, impacting the strategies that queer men used within the workforce. For some respondents, hegemonic masculinity served as a primary form of capital, whereby advantages (both material and non-material) were tied to one's ability to embody and perform hegemonic masculinity. For others, specific forms of queerness operated as a form of symbolic currency that carried exchange value for those who were able to align with these stereotypical notions of what it means to be a queer man. Gendered performances and presentations, then, operated as a form of capital in the workplace that could be exchanged for personal gain. Above all else, boundary brightness was dependent on whether respondents believed that specific gender performances operated as a form of cultural capital in their work organization and whether these forms of capital had exchange value.

Respondents in the "Consistently Bright" group almost all noted that hegemonic masculinity served as a chief form of symbolic currency in their chosen line of work, due in large part to the association of masculinity with competency in their industry. Since many of these respondents were in the performing arts and many roles and characters are straight men, queer men understood that they were most likely to succeed if they were able to believably pass as straight, which meant strictly aligning with displays of hegemonic masculinity. For these respondents, their sexuality served as a basis for disadvantage in the workforce due to its cultural association with femininity. Given both the privileging of hegemonic masculinity in their chosen profession and the cultural association of queerness with femininity for men, respondents in the "Consistently Bright" group perceived a bright boundary surrounding their sexuality in the workforce.

Those in the "Brightened Boundaries" category also perceived a bright boundary surrounding their sexuality in the workforce, though for different reasons than respondents in the "Consistently Bright" group. Those in the "Brightened Boundaries" group entered work organizations where (white middle class) queerness was valorized and operated as a form of symbolic currency. These respondents noted being met with expectations from coworkers and supervisors that they make salient their sexuality, both through disclosure and identity performances that made their sexuality salient at work. These performances were largely expected to align with hegemonic cultural beliefs surrounding what it means to be a queer or gay man, including more feminine expressions and filling the funny and non-threatening "gay best friend" role at work. These identity performances were especially constrained for queer men of color in the "Brightened Boundaries" group, who often noted playing up their queer identity by playing up femininity in order to offset the stigma associated with their racial identity in white spaces and to be seen as less threatening and more relatable to their white coworkers.

For respondents in the “Dimmed Boundaries” group, the boundary surrounding their sexuality was blurred in the context of their workplace. This lack of a boundary was largely due to both work composition and the decoupling of cultural ideas about gender and sexuality and ability in their work organization. These respondents all reported large queer representation in their organization, which they noted helped curtail feelings of difference at work; since there were so many queer people in their workplace, it was seen as a less consequential axes of difference. Further, these respondents were concentrated in workplaces and occupations where ideas about ability and competence were not associated with either masculinity or femininity.

The significance that sexuality took on in the workplace also worked to shape the way respondents understood and related to their sexuality and gender expression. Respondents working in industries where their sexuality challenged their ability to succeed or secure employment came to see their sexuality as something that needed to be managed, often through curated gender performances and presentations. Respondents in the “Consistently Bright” group noted monitoring their expressions and bodies both in and outside of work by attempting to mitigate any expressions that may be read as feminine or queer, so that they may more believably and seamlessly pass as straight when working. Juxtaposed with these narratives were those from respondents in the “Brightened Boundaries” group, who explained that their experiences in the workforce worked to increase the significance they gave to their sexuality, both in and outside of work. Many respondents in this group conveyed that their sexuality was not something they understood to be central to their self-conception until they entered the workforce, where they encountered work organizations and cultures that valorized specific expression of queerness. These respondents, in turn, came to see their sexuality as something that made them sufficiently different from straight-identifying men and as something that was a meaningful component of how they saw and defined themselves, especially in relation to others.

Following Ridgeway and Correll (2004), this chapter conceptualizes the workplace as a social relational context, where actors shape their behavior and expectations based on how they define themselves in relation to others through ongoing processes of boundary work. Most often, actors use social identities such as race, gender, sexuality, and age to categorize themselves and others and to establish degrees of similarity and difference (West and Zimmerman 1987; Somers 1994; Lamont and Molnar 2002; Hill-Collins 2004; Feinstein 2017; Hamilton et al. 2020). Once categorized, actors are expected to act in ways that are consistent with cultural beliefs pertaining to what it means to be a member of a particular identity group (West and Zimmerman 1987; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Ridgeway 2011; Feinstein 2017). These expectations work to constrain the identity performances of certain groups while simultaneously biasing performance expectations and evaluations for marginalized or under-represented groups in the workplace (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Actors self-definitions, however, vary and are shaped by what is seen as important and contextually relevant (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). For queer men in my sample, their self-definitions and the salience their sexuality took on in work contexts were predicated on the valorized forms of cultural capital of their work organizations, which shaped both the significance that their sexuality took on in that particular context and their subsequent identity performances. This cultural capital was context-specific and varied widely.

Context-specific capital, then, operates as a boundary brightening and blurring mechanism, shaping both the meaning that queer sexuality takes on in a given workplace and which expressions were valorized for queer workers. This challenges the long-standing notion in organizational scholarship that organizations are neutral, bureaucratic structures (see Rios 2019 for an overview). Past scholarship has also challenged this idea that organizations are neutral with regard to the identities people bring into them, demonstrating the various ways in which organizations themselves are racial (Rios 2019) and gendered (Kanter 1977, Acker 1990) structures. This project highlights the ways in which organizations are sexualized as well as raced and gendered. Respondents perceived a bright boundary surrounding their sexuality when in work organizations or industries where the context specific cultural capital valorized or stigmatized stereotypical notions about what it means to be a (middle class and white) queer man. Those working in occupations or industries where hegemonic masculinity operates as a dominant form of cultural capital perceived a bright boundary as it pertains to their sexuality because they saw their sexuality as a source of disadvantage or stigma in the workforce, whereas those working in work organizations where queerness operated as a form of cultural capital perceived a bright boundary because they understood that others expected them to align with stereotypical notions of what it means to be a queer man and that aligning with these ideas came with an exchange value. Respondents perceived a dim or non-existent boundary in work contexts with greater queer representation, where the context specific cultural capital was less tied to particular identity performances, especially as it relates to gender and sexuality. Given the diversity of queer workers in these organizations, there was a less constrictive ides of what constitutes a good worker and a wider range of acceptable identity performances for queer workers. Respondents in the "Never Bright" group also perceived a dim or non-existent boundary, most often noting that their queer sexuality took on little meaning in their work context or that their gender presentation made it so that their sexuality was not the primary frame through which they believe others viewed them.

These forms of context specific cultural capital were also deeply racialized. Queer men of color in the “Brightened Boundaries” group noted encountering a different set of expectations from coworkers and supervisors than their queer white co-workers. Regardless of industry or occupation, queer men of color in the “Brightened Boundaries” group noted that their queerness operated as a form of cultural capital for them in their predominantly white work organizations. Though most of these men noted their racial identity having taken on greater symbolic significance in their lives prior to entering into the workforce, the expectations they were met with in their work organizations worked to brighten the boundary surrounding their sexuality—as it operates as a form of symbolic currency in these contexts and helps blur the boundary surrounding their racial identity in majority-white and middle class work contexts. Aligning with past intersectional work on boundary modification and contestation (Wilkins 2004; Wilkins 2012; Feinstein 2017), this chapter finds that through their racialized, gendered, and sexualized performances in the workplace, queer men of color, and queer Black men in particular, work to destabilize the symbolic boundary surrounding their racial identity but do so by reifying and making salient the boundary surrounding their sexuality through their gendered performances. Many of the queer Black men in this sample, for instance, manipulated their gender performances in order to come off as less masculine in order to make salient their queer sexuality in their attempts to dim the boundary surrounding their racial identity in predominantly white work contexts. Though potentially subverting long-standing notions about what it means to be a Black man, these respondents simultaneously reified cultural associations about what it means to be a queer man. Thus, this destabilization of racial boundaries was predicated on the enactment of both rigid and constrained sexual and gendered performances for queer respondents of color. Further, aligning with past work (Green 2008; Moon 2008), this chapter highlights the complexity of capital. Though it may have provided respondents with varying degrees of momentary power at work, this did not necessarily translate into greater privilege or authority at work.

Among queer men of color in this sample, Black respondents most consistently expressed feeling constrained at work by the prevailing cultural stereotypes and expectations surrounding Black masculinity. Whereas many Hispanic respondents also echoed feeling similarly constrained by stereotypes about Hispanic masculinity and playing up their sexuality at work to lessen the stigma associated with their racial identity, their narratives were more diverse than those of the Black men in this sample. Many queer Hispanic men did believe their sexuality (and racial identity) influenced their career decisions and entered into jobs where their sexuality and racial identity were not consequential axes of difference (including those in the "Consistently Bright" and "Dimmed Boundaries" groups). For Hispanic respondents who did not see their sexuality as structuring their career decisions (such as those in the "Brightened Boundaries" and "Never Bright" groups) and then entered into professional predominantly white work organizations, their accounts regarding their work experiences aligned more closely with those of Black respondents.

How do queer men respond to these expectations, and what may this mean for how they navigate their workplace? Past work finds that queer men engage in a number of identity performances to mitigate stigma in the workplace but has done less to explore how these strategies may be shaped by context. This chapter asserts that a work organization's context-specific cultural capital shapes status expectation of and for queer men, shaping the symbolic significance that queer identity takes on in a given workplace or work setting. When queer men enter work contexts where particular gender performances and presentations operate as a form of cultural capital, such as in finance or the performing arts, their queer identity takes on a greater symbolic significance as it is seen as either being a hindering or an enabling force for garnering security and status. For those men who believed their sexuality took on little symbolic significance at work, they reported little constraint or pressure with regard to how they performed or embodied their various identities. Rather, they articulated feeling free to act in ways that felt authentic to them. For those respondents who believed their sexuality *did* take on symbolic significance in the context of their workplace, their strategies for navigating the workplace were often heavily reliant on masculinity, either aligning or distancing themselves from notions of what it means to be hegemonically masculine, depending on what was valorized in their given work context. Aligning with past work (Hill-Collins 2004; Wilkins 2004; Green 2008; Schilt 2010; Ocampo 2012; Wilkins 2012), respondents' reliance on gender performance and presentation in their attempts to make their sexuality more or less salient speaks to the ways in which gender and sexuality are bound up with one another. Respondents' belief that the stigma surrounding one's sexuality could be offset by more strictly aligning with hegemonically masculine gender performances and presentations highlights respondents' belief that what is particularly stigmatizing about queer identity in the workplace is its association with femininity and that what makes queer identity salient to others is a deviation from hegemonically masculine gender performances and presentations. Similarly, in using strategies that highlighted difference between their own gender presentation and hegemonic masculinity, respondents who understood their sexuality as a form of cultural capital in the workplace and "played up" their sexuality by acting more "feminine" implicitly expressed an understanding that to be queer is to be not hegemonically masculine, and to perform and embody queerness is to perform difference from hegemonic masculinity. Past work has demonstrated that the embodiment and performance of hegemonic masculinity is central to the work experiences straight-identifying men (Berdahl et al. 2018). This chapter builds on that work in highlighting that masculinity and the manipulation of gender performances are also central to the work experiences of queer men and serves as a basis by which they counter discrimination and stigmatization or gain resources and status.

Thus, for men in my sample, the symbolic significance that their sexuality took on in the workforce was predicated on their industry's or work organization's context-specific cultural capital and how closely it is tied with particular gender expressions or identity characteristics. But, how may the sphere of work impact queer men's self-conceptions more broadly? Extant work has established that identity characteristics and self-conceptions impact our career decisions (Charles and Bradley 2009; Cech 2013), including what to major in, what fields to enter into (Beasley 2012; Mullen 2014), and even what roles to fill within organizations (Blair-Loy 2003; Harvey-Wingfield 2010; Ridgeway 2011). Less explored, however, are the ways in which work and our experiences in the world of work influence our self-conceptions and how we relate to and understand our social identities. One of the central challenges put forth by queer theory has been to question the assumed stability of identities and the meanings that actors attach to them (Epstein 1994; Seidman 1994; Pfeffer 2014). I contend that the sphere of work can meaningfully and powerfully shape the ways in which social actors think about and relate to their social identities. This chapter demonstrates that the relationship between work and identity is ongoing and mutually reinforcing. Respondents in the "Consistently Bright" group noted being led into their line of work by their experiences as a queer man. Yet, once in the world of work, they learn to downplay any supposed and apparent differences between themselves and straight, hegemonically masculine men. Though many in this group believed their sexuality served as a consequential axes of difference that shaped their career decisions, their experiences in the workforce left them with the understanding that the identity that led them into this line of work could also serve as the basis for stigmatization for them in the workforce, forcing these men to adopt identity management strategies, both in and outside of work, that made their sexuality less salient to others. Respondents in the "Brightened Boundaries" group also noted changing the way they thought about and related to their sexuality after entering the workforce. Though prior to entering the workforce, men in this group did not see their sexuality as the defining aspect of who they are or their self-definition, their experiences in the workforce made them see their sexuality as a meaningful axes of difference, largely shaped by others expectations of them and the rewards (both symbolic and material) they received from aligning themselves with stereotypical notions of what it means to be a queer man. These accounts from both those in the "Consistently Bright" and "Brightened Boundaries" group speak to the relational and fluid nature of identity, in that it is continually being influenced against perceived others and ideas of difference (Somers 1994; Lamont and Molnar 2002). Further, this highlights the ways in which work may serve as a particularly impactful social relational context whereby identities are continually negotiated and are often predicated on what is valorized and rewarded in given work contexts.

This chapter highlights that context is central to discussions surrounding sexuality and work. I find that context-specific cultural capital shapes the symbolic significance and meaning that queer sexuality takes on in a given work organization or industry, which in turn impacts how queer men experience and negotiate their various identities in the workforce. Further, this study demonstrates that the sphere of work is one in which social identities are imbued with meaning in ways that consequentially impact how queer men understand, relate to, and perform their various identities.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

Extant work surrounding the career-related decisions and workforce experiences of sexual minority men has implicitly assumed a categorical stability. In examining queer men's representation in certain occupations or the identity management strategies that queer men take up in the workplace, past work has operated under the assumption that sexuality meaningfully impacts the ways in which queer men experience and make decisions about the world of work. In doing so, these studies leave a great deal of within-category diversity unaccounted for—including diversity in experiences, diversity in identity salience and centrality, and diversity along the lines of race, class, and gender presentation. Without accounting for this diversity, we have yet to explain for whom and why sexuality takes on importance in the world of work as well as the varying ways in which queer men make career-related decisions and experience both the labor market and the workforce.

The goal of this project was to explicate the career narratives of college-educated queer men living and working in the New York Metropolitan area. In detailing the narratives of a diverse set of queer men employed in a variety of occupations and industries, this project explored the significance that they attributed to their sexuality in structuring their decisions and experiences across a variety of career stages: (1) the career selection process, (2) the ways in which they navigated the labor market, and (3) the ways in which they experienced and moved throughout the workforce. Rather than assuming that one's sexuality meaningfully shaped their experiences across these stages, this project left this open as an empirical question. In doing so, this project was able to examine why and for whom sexuality took on significance at any given stage as well as the relational and contextual factors that shaped this significance. Further, this project examined not only if and how one's sexuality shaped their career-related decisions but also how one's work and workforce experiences shape how they understand and relate to their sexuality. The central argument of this project is that the role that one's sexuality plays in structuring career decisions and experiences in the workforce is largely dependent on the perceived boundary brightness surrounding their sexuality and that this boundary brightness is subject to change across stages in one's career narrative. This boundary brightness was influenced by how *meaningful and consequential* of a difference respondents believed their sexuality to be during a given career stage and how *central* their sexuality was to their self-conception. This boundary brightness was relational; it took on a brighter property when respondents saw it as something that made them meaningfully different from straight-identifying men in a given stage or context.

I drew on the career narratives of 67 queer-identifying men living and working in New York City to explore the role that sexuality played in delineating their experiences in the world of work. In exploring this question, I took up a narrative approach for several reasons. First, the narrative approach is useful for understanding within-category diversity and categorical instability in action (Somers 1994). In attempting to break from a categorical approach to understanding the ways in which queer men make sense of the world of work, the narrative approach allows respondents to highlight what they believe is most impactful in structuring their career-related decisions and workforce experiences more broadly. Second, narratives allow us to understand why certain actors see their sexuality as impactful in this sphere and why others may not. Social actors give meaning to certain life events through narratives—allowing for an examination of when and for whom sexuality comes to be seen as consequential in structuring work experiences. Lastly, the narrative approach allows for change and an examination of not only how identities shape career decisions but also how careers impact our identities.

Respondents are grouped based on boundary brightness across three stages in their career narratives (career-related decisions, the labor market, and the workforce). The first is the Consistently Bright group—for whom sexuality meaningfully shaped their career decisions, experiences on the labor market, and experiences once in the workforce. Respondents in this group perceived a bright boundary surrounding their sexuality throughout their career narratives. The next group, the Dimmed Boundaries group, saw their sexuality as structuring their career decisions but not as something that they had to manage on the labor market or in the workforce. For these respondents, the boundary surrounding their sexuality became less bright upon entering the workforce, due in large part to the careers and industries that they were entering into. The third group, the Brightened Boundaries group, did not see their sexuality as something that shaped their career-related decisions but as something that shaped their experiences either on the labor market or once in the workforce. Respondents in the Dimmed Boundaries group were often met with specific expectations once in the workforce that shaped both the symbolic significance they attributed to their sexuality and the ways in which they embodied it. Lastly, those in the Never Bright group did not perceive their sexuality as meaningfully structuring their decisions or experiences at any stage of their career narratives.

In detailing respondents' career narratives, which encompassed their career-related decisions as well as their labor market and workplace experiences, this project has demonstrated that the significance queer men attributed to their sexuality in their career narratives was predicated on both their self-understandings and the symbolic significance they attributed to their sexuality. More specifically, for queer men to understand their sexuality as having influenced their career-related decisions and labor market/workforce experiences, respondents had to see their sexuality as something that was central to their self-understanding and/or took on consequential significance at a given stage. When one’s sexuality was central to their self-conceptions and/or seen as consequential, respondents perceived a bright symbolic boundary surrounding their sexuality, understanding it as something that operates as a meaningful form of difference, especially in relation to straight-identifying men. Whether queer men in this sample understood their sexuality as being central to their self-understanding or as a consequential axes of difference was fostered by (1) past experiences that demarcated queer sexuality as a significant form of difference, (2) cultural schemas, such as the ideal worker, that delineate who can and cannot be successful in a given line of work, and (3) context-specific cultural capital that can make queer sexuality more or less salient in a given work organization.

SEXUALITY, BOUNDARIES, AND THE WORLD OF WORK

This project aligns with past work that contends that actors in similar social positions (i.e. those that share identity characteristics) do not necessarily share self-definitions or act in similar ways (Somers 1994; Hill-Collins 2004; Moon 2012; Hamilton et al. 2020). All respondents in this sample identified as sexual minorities, with the vast majority identifying themselves as “gay,” yet differences emerged regarding the role their sexuality played in structuring their career decisions and their experiences on the labor market and the workforce. Whereas some respondents saw their sexuality as the chief factor in their career-related decisions, others could not fathom how or why it would play such a vital role in this sphere of life. Similarly, some respondents saw their sexuality as one of the most central aspects in shaping their work experiences, while others saw sexuality as something that both was and should be completely separate from their work experiences. In short, the career narratives of queer men in this sample varied widely, highlighting the immense within-category diversity among queer men in the workforce.

This diversity speaks to the inability of categorical approaches to capture the significance that sexuality takes on in the world of work for queer men. As Moon (2012) points out, scholars too often speak about identity in totalizing ways, assuming that those occupying similar social structuring positions share similar self-definitions and identities. This project demonstrates that such an approach to understanding the career decisions and work experiences among queer men would miss both why sexuality can be impactful and under what conditions one's sexuality becomes more or less salient and/or consequential. By allowing for the possibility that one's sexuality was not a central force in their career narrative, the present study scrutinizes *why* sexuality shapes career decisions and experiences for some queer men and not others, highlighting the mechanisms undergirding importance of sexuality in delineating career decisions experiences in the labor force more broadly.

The present study argues that queer men's sexuality took on importance *relationally*, meaning that it takes on significance within contexts and through interactions where it is demarcated as a significant and meaningful axes of difference. When recognized as a potentially consequential form of *difference*, one's queer sexuality became central to their self-understanding as well as shaped respondents' decisions and the ways in which they navigated the world of work. These feelings of difference were molded by a number of factors, including experiences with bullying or stigmatization growing up, cultural schemas that delineate who can and cannot be successful in a given line of work, and others' expectations about how to properly embody and perform queer sexuality in the workplace. The mechanisms that led respondents to see their sexuality as a meaningful form of difference varied across the various stages of one's career narratives. Respondents who reported that their sexuality did impact their career decisions believed this was the case because of past experiences that led them to see their sexuality as something that made them meaningfully different from other men, which shaped their interests and passions. In seeking employment, respondents who saw their sexuality as shaping their experiences on the labor market noted that this was the case because their sexuality served as a something that meaningfully differentiated them from the ideal worker in their chosen line of work. Once in the workforce, respondents who believed their experiences were shaped by their sexuality reported that valorization (or lack thereof) of queerness in their line of work or work organization made their sexuality both a meaningful form of difference at work and something that needed to be performed in specific ways.

These findings demonstrate that it is not one's social structural position or categorization as queer that shapes career decisions and experiences in the world of work but rather the symbolic significance that one's queer sexuality is imbued with. Respondents who did not see their sexuality as something that consequentially differentiated their lived experiences or as something that they felt pressure to respond to in the workforce did not see their sexuality as structuring their career decisions or their experiences on the labor market or in the workforce. One's sexuality became a salient and organizing feature in the sphere of work when respondents understood it as having symbolic significance at any given stage—as both a meaningful form of difference and a lens through which they understood and experienced their social world.

Given the centrality of relationality and symbolic significance in respondents' career narratives, I argue that boundaries are paramount in understanding queer men's career-related decisions and their experiences on the labor market and in the workforce. Given that many respondents did not see their sexuality as an organizing feature at any stage of their career narratives, I posit that it is not the form social difference, such as sexuality, that shapes queer men's experiences in the world of work but rather the symbolic boundary surrounding their sexuality. Bringing symbolic boundaries into discussions of sexuality and work highlights one such mechanism linking queer sexuality to career decisions or work experiences. Further, bringing boundaries into this discussion helps to explain within-category variation—detailing why it influences some respondents' decisions and experiences and not others. At each stage of the career narrative, whether respondents saw their sexuality as structuring their decisions or experiences was predicated on whether they perceived a bright boundary surrounding their sexuality.

Conceptualizing the salience of sexuality as relational and predicated on the symbolic significance attributed to it also highlights how one's work can shape how queer men think about and relate to their sexuality. Extant work details the ways in which identities impact career decisions (Charles and Bradley 2009; Cech 2013; Mullen 2014; Tilcsik, Anteby and Knight 2015), especially for marginalized groups (Cech 2011; Cech 2013; Beasley 2012; Tilcsik, Anteby and Knight 2015), but less explored are the ways in which one's work or workplace experiences impact their self-understandings and the significance they attribute to their various identities. This project finds that work has the potential to shape how queer men relate to and embody their sexuality, shaped primarily by which expressions are and are not valorized in their given work organization or line of work. Respondents' narratives highlight that work organizations or industries more broadly privilege certain forms of context-specific cultural capital and that these forms of capital differ in their valorization of queer sexual identities. In work spaces where hegemonic masculinity or stereotypical notions of queerness operate as a dominant form of cultural capital, respondents attributed great symbolic significance to their sexuality due, in large part, to the ways in which these forms of context-specific cultural capital associate specific rewards or costs with queer sexual identities. Respondents working in industries or work organizations where the context-specific cultural capital was less strictly tied to specific gender or sexual performances perceived their sexuality took on little symbolic significance at work, allowing them to act in ways that felt authentic to them. Context-specific cultural capital thus operates as a boundary brightening or blurring mechanism for queer men in the workforce, shaping the identity management strategies that queer men undertook in their attempts to navigate the workforce.

Past work has established that queer workers navigate their workplaces in constrained ways, often in attempts to circumvent stigma (Ward and Winstanley 2005; Ragins and Cornwall 2008; Schilt 2010). The present study highlights the importance of focusing on the work context more specifically, the ways in which context and context-specific cultural capital shapes the salience that queer sexuality takes on at work, and the identity management strategies that queer men use within their respective work spaces. Much literature has centered on queer workers decisions regarding whether and to whom they disclose their sexuality to at work (Ward and Winstanley 2005; Ragins 2008). All but two respondents in this sample classified themselves as "out" at work to all or nearly all of their coworkers. Respondents in this sample were less concerned with *if* they were going to be out at work and more concerned with *how* to be out and *how* to perform their queerness at work, predicated largely on what is valorized in a given workplace and the subsequent expectations queer men faced in enacting their sexuality at work.

To summarize, this project departs from past work on sexuality, career decisions, and experiences by moving away from a categorical approach to explore the within-category diversity in queer men's career narratives. In so doing, this project scrutinizes why and under what conditions sexuality matters in queer men's career decisions, attempts to garner employment, and experiences once in the workforce. By utilizing a narrative approach, this project highlights the importance of symbolic boundaries in understanding why some queer men see their sexuality as having shaped their career decisions and experiences and why others did not. What makes sexuality constraining and gives it the power to shape queer men's career decisions, the strategies they use on the labor market, and their experiences once in the workforce is the symbolic significance attributed to that identity and the feelings of difference that follow. In each of the three stages of respondents' career narratives, respondents attributed varying degrees of significance to their sexuality regarding its impact on shaping their decisions and experiences, highlighting the immense within-category diversity among queer men in my sample. Analyzing this diversity through the lens of boundary brightness helps us make sense of this within-category diversity, highlighting when and under what conditions queer men's sexuality shapes their career decisions and work experiences

CENTERING MASCULINITY IN DISCUSSIONS OF SEXUALITY AND WORK

Masculinity was front and center in respondents' career narratives. The present study highlights the crucial role of masculinity in structuring queer men's career decisions, experiences on the labor market, and their work experiences more broadly. With regard to educational and career-related decisions, masculinity was paramount in shaping queer men's feelings of difference from straight-identifying men in junior high and high school, which was paramount in shaping their career decisions. Once on the labor market, masculinity was articulated as being central to the distance they perceived between themselves and the ideal worker in their chosen line of work, shaping the strategies they used to garner employment. Further, the extent to which hegemonic masculinity was valorized in a given work context shaped the salience respondents believed their sexuality took on at work and shaped the identity management strategies they used in the workplace. At each stage, respondents who noted an inability to navigate hegemonically masculine contexts or environments perceived a bright boundary surrounding their sexuality. In contrast, respondents who reported regularly navigating hegemonically masculine environments with ease perceived no such bright boundary surrounding their sexuality and less often saw their sexuality as playing a central or consequential role in shaping their career narratives. In sum, respondents understood their sexuality as taking on symbolic meaning through its devaluation on the masculine hierarchy. Masculinity, then, serves as a boundary brightening and blurring mechanism at each stage in queer men's career narratives, working to shape their career-related decisions and experiences on the labor market and in the workforce.

Past work has highlighted the central role that masculinity plays in structuring work experiences—in both what is valorized in a given work context and the strategies workers deploy to gain important resources (Blair-Loy 2005; Britton and Logan 2008; Faulkner 2009; Schilt 2010; Berdahl et al. 2018). Recent scholarship has actually posited that work can be conceptualized as a "masculinity contest," an arena where workers gain status and power through displays of masculinity and where the privileging of masculinity delineates how workers are treated and how their work is assessed (Berdahl et al. 2018). Yet, with notable exceptions (e.g. Schilt 2010; Williams et al. 2016; Williams et al. 2018), the vast majority of research surrounding masculinity and work has centered on white, straight-identifying men. The present study argues that masculinity is also central to the labor market and work experiences of queer men. Both on the labor market and once in the workforce, the valorization of hegemonic masculinity is what made difference on the basis of sexuality salient for queer men and is also what was used and manipulated to manage and respond to these boundaries.

Much work on queer sexuality and the workplace has taken up the work of Goffman (1963) in positing that sexuality operates as a form of concealable stigma for queer workers to manage (Ward and Winstanley 2005; Yoshino 2006; Ragins 2008; Tilcsik, Anteby and Knight 2015; Cech and Rothwell 2020). This work highlights that the central challenge for workers with a concealable stigma is to manage whether and to what extent it is made salient in their public interactions (Goffman 1963; Tilcsik, Anteby and Knight 2015). Most often, this line of scholarship centers on queer workers' decisions regarding whether, where, and to whom to disclose their sexuality—positing that queer workers do this in a number of ways (Ward and Winstanley 2005; Yoshino 2006; Ragins 2008). The present project, however, departs from past studies in that all but one respondent in this sample was "out" at work, and almost all respondents who were "out" at work reported that everyone or nearly everyone in their work organization knew that they were queer. For respondents in this sample, managing stigma was less about decisions surrounding disclosure and more about how and to what extent to perform difference on the basis of their sexuality. The extent to which difference was performed was based largely on respondents' work organizations, cultural capital, and the extent to which this capital did or did not valorize masculinity for queer workers. Respondents used and manipulated gender performances in their attempts to play up or play down difference along the lines of their sexuality—attempting to align more strictly with hegemonically masculine gender performances in contexts where masculinity was valorized and "leveraging femininity" in contexts where stereotypical ideas about queerness operated as a form of cultural capital.

This project aligns with past work (Pascoe 2007; Schilt and Westbrook 2009; Briges and Pascoe 2014; Westbrook and Schilt 2014) in demonstrating that gender and sexuality are inextricably tied together. Masculinity was central to whether queer men perceived a bright boundary surrounding their sexuality and to the ways in which queer men responded to this bright boundary. Respondents who believed their sexuality challenged their ability to garner employment or succeed in their chosen line of work responded to this by manipulating their gender performances so as to mitigate the stigma surrounding their sexuality and be seen as competent. Juxtaposed with this, respondents in work contexts that valorized stereotypical displays of queerness for queer workers aligned with this image by emphasizing or aligning with more stereotypical notions of femininity. This finding highlights that for respondents in my sample, they understood that to perform their sexuality is to perform gender—to perform queerness is to perform femininity and to distance oneself from queerness is to perform hegemonic masculinity. These performances are consequential; in queer men's attempts to align or distance themselves from stereotypical images surrounding their sexuality, they simultaneously reify ideas about difference or uphold the masculine hierarchy through the ideation of hegemonic masculinity.

In summary, this project argues that hegemonic masculinity serves as a boundary brightening or blurring mechanism surrounding queer men's sexuality at each stage of their career narratives, highlighting difference or similarity between queer and straight men and structuring their career-related decisions and labor market and work experiences. Further, the present study finds that queer men use and manipulate their gender performances to manage the stigma associated with their sexuality on the labor market and in the workforce. The decision was less about *if* they were going to be out at work and more about *how* they were going enact and embody their queerness at work, predicated largely on gendered performances. Lastly, this study demonstrates that to understand queer men's career decisions and experiences on the labor market and at work, we need to consider masculinity, as it is both central to how queer men form career aspirations and to the significance they attribute to their sexuality on both the labor market and once in the workforce.

THE INTERSECTION OF RACE, MASCULINITY AND SEXUALITY IN QUEER MEN'S CAREER NARRATIVES

Most work on queer men's career decisions and workforce experiences has done little to consider how these decisions and experiences may be racialized. Given both the multifaceted ways in which queer men of color relate to and understanding their sexuality (Hunter 2010; Ocampo 2012) and the differential ways in which employers valorize queer men along the lines of race (Remedios et al. 2011; Pedulla 2014), it is likely that these decisions and experiences vary greatly along the lines of race. Indeed, the present study finds that for many queer men of color, race was central in delineating both their career-related decisions, experiences on the labor market, and once in the workforce—though the significance that it took on varied widely. With regard to their career-related decisions, most respondents of color noted that their racial identity and experiences as a person of color meaningfully shaped their career decisions—leading them to select certain college majors and careers that allowed them to understand and make sense of their lived experience or that they felt could have a positive impact on their communities. The majority of queer respondents of color in this sample did not report that their career-related decisions were shaped in any way by their sexuality—often noting that this was because their racial identity took on a more central role in structuring their lived experience than did their sexuality, which they largely saw as something that was less likely to serve as the basis for unequal treatment or discrimination.

Though many men of color in this sample did not see their sexuality as having influenced their career-related decisions, most did note that the meaning their sexuality took on changed once on the labor market or in the workforce. This was especially true for Black respondents, who were acutely aware of the meaning that their racial identity took on in predominantly white spaces and noted that Black men are often stereotyped as hyper aggressive and threatening. In their attempts to circumvent the stigma associated with their racial identity in predominantly white spaces, queer men of color reported making their sexuality both known and salient in order to appear as less threatening and more relatable to both those who were interviewing them and to their white co-workers once in the workplace. Past work supports this finding, noting that queer Black men are more likely than both straight Black men and queer white men to be hired and paid a higher starting wage (Remedios et al. 2011; Pedulla 2014). Though lacking the data to say, these authors posit that this is likely due to the ways in which queer masculinity offsets the perceived threat surrounding Black masculinity—arguing that queer Black men may receive a sort of "intersectional freedom" due to the intersection of gender, race, and sexuality. Yet, this project findings that this "advantage" needs to be continually maintained and negotiated once in the workforce, so that queer men of color regularly craft particular identity performances and presentations to mitigate the stigma associated with Black masculinity. They did so by aligning their gender presentations and performances with stereotypical notions of (white) middle-class queerness and by distancing themselves from stereotypical notions of the "angry Black man." Thus, although sexuality was not central in the career decisions in many of their career narratives, queer men of color noted that this often changed upon entering the workforce, where they were met with particular expectations from white audiences to both play up their sexuality and play down their racial identity. For many queer men of color, the symbolic boundary surrounding their sexuality brightened in the workforce due to both the meaning that their racial identity takes on in white spaces and the ways in which queerness subverts the stigma associated with their racial identity in predominantly white spaces.

This study sheds light on the ways in which space shapes how multiply marginalized groups negotiate their identities and how certain identities may be privileged or negotiated in distinct spaces. No known study to date has examined the ways in which queer Black men simultaneously negotiate their race, gender, and sexual identities and the role that context plays in these negotiations. This project argues that queer Black men are constrained in their identity performances in professional, predominantly white work organizations—feeling a tension to distance themselves from stereotypical notions of Black masculinity to circumvent stigmatization and/or discrimination at work. To distance themselves from prevailing images of Black masculinity, queer Black men in this sample relied on their sexuality and gendered performances that highlight it so as to downplay the perceived risks associated with their racial identity. Highlighting the interconnectedness of race, gender, and sexuality, queer Black men used gendered performances (i.e. leveraging femininity) to signal their sexuality to interviewers and co-workers in their efforts to mitigate the perceived stigma surrounding their racial identity. Aligning with past intersectional work (Wilkins 2004; Wilkins 2012; Feinstein 2017; Hamilton et al. 2020), this project argues that in subverting ideas about race, queer men of color (queer Black men in particular) feel accountable to perform stereotypically gendered performances that both reify ideas about queerness and its place on the masculine hierarchy more broadly.

SEXUALITY AND THE WORLD OF WORK

This project highlights that the meaning that sexuality takes on in the career decisions, on the labor market, and in the workforce for queer men is both diverse and fluid. There was immense diversity among respondents with regard to the significance they believe their sexuality took on for them, and these accounts also varied widely by stage of the career narrative. For many respondents, their sexuality took on different meanings at different stages and in different contexts. The significance that sexuality took on for queer men in my sample at any given stage of their career narrative was predicated on the symbolic significance that was both internally and externally attributed to it. This symbolic significance was dependent on both (1) whether it was seen as a meaningful and/or consequential form of difference and (2) whether it was central to their self-understanding. To put it in terms of boundaries, in order for sexuality to take on symbolic significance, respondents had to both (1) recognize a bright boundary surrounding their sexuality that separated queer from non-queer men and (2) place themselves within this boundary—tied largely to how they saw themselves in relation to others. Much work to date has sought to explain the mechanisms undergirding identity and career choice (Charles and Bradley 2009; Cech 2013; Mullen 2014), identity and garnering employment (Royster 2003; Smith 2005; Tilcsik 2011; Rivera 2012; Pedulla 2014; Rivera 2015; Mishel 2016), and how members of particular identity groups experience the workforce (Ward and Winstanley 2005; Harvey-Wingfield 2007; Ragins 2008; Harvey-Wingfield 2010; Schilt 2010). Rather than conceptualizing queer men as a group that shares similar experiences and acts on the grounds of a shared identity with regard to their career decisions, labor market experiences, and experiences in the workforce, the present study argues for a more nuanced discussion of sexuality and work that recognizes the vast diversity in lived experience among queer men and in the ways in which queer men relate to their sexuality, which all work to differentiate the experiences of queer men in this sample across the various stages of their career narratives. Central to this study is the assertion that it is not sexuality itself that shapes career decisions and experiences but rather the symbolic significance that one’s sexuality takes on in a given context, which is constructed relationally.

Aside from the theoretical implications of this project, this study also has implications for high school educators and work organizations more broadly. First, nearly half of the respondents in this sample noted facing bullying and/or stigmatization on the basis of their (actual or perceived) sexuality in junior high and high school. Though the disadvantageous experiences of LGBTQ teens in junior high and high school is well documented (Pascoe 2011), the present study highlights how these experiences may actually have long-term impacts—both in constraining and shaping the career prospects and decisions of queer students. Queer students, then, will be in the best position to realize their full potential in contexts where they are free from homophobia and stigmatization on the basis of their sexuality. Rather than making it to where queer students have to seek out extra-curriculars (such as theatre, dance, or art) to feel accepted, educators, counselors, and administration should work diligently to cultivate a learning environment where queer students feel accepted and free from negative experiences on the basis of their sexuality.

With regard to work organizations, this study finds that representation and diversity (along the lines of gender, race, and sexuality) matter greatly. Respondents noted feeling the greatest level of comfort when interviewing for organizations that they knew had both queer men, women, and people of color not only in their work organization but also in leadership positions. To them, this illustrated that they too would be able to succeed in the organization and that their success would not be determined or hindered based on their sexual or racial identity. To highlight this, organizations should make note of both the diversity in their organization and the ways in which diversity is valued in the organization on their websites and during interviews.

The goal of this project was to understand the significance that queer men attributed to their sexuality in structuring their career-related decisions and experiences on the labor market and in the workforce. This is a vast undertaking and comes with several limitations. First, this project relies on narratives of already employed queer men, meaning that it is relying on after-the-fact explanations regarding their career decisions and strategies used to navigate the labor market. Though a justification for this approach has been given various times throughout the manuscript (pp. 23-24, 50, 75-77), it does limit our ability to scrutinize whether one's sexuality actually took on the significance that they report that it did during these stages.

Though explicitly mentioned at times, social class tended to take a more latent, or less recognized, role in the career narratives respondents offered up, though it certainly was deeply impactful not only in their career decisions, but also in their experiences and opportunities on the labor market and in the workforce. For example, many of the men who went into finance or more lucrative occupations noted coming from (upper) middle class households. Though many of these men did not articulate class being more central than sexuality in shaping their career decisions, they did often note their career decisions being driven by their ideas of what constitutes a respectable career or a good life. It may be, then, that class shapes the career decisions of queer men in innocuous ways, working to make sexuality more or less central. Future work should more deeply explore the ways in which class shapes the career decisions and experiences of queer men, and how race, gender, sexuality, and class intersect to create different lived experiences in this sphere. Further, future work should extend this approach to blue-collar workers and those without a college education, who may face even greater constraints and fewer choices within the world of work than respondents in this sample did.

Next, this project draws from a specific sample—namely, college-educated queer-identifying men living and working in New York City. Though an ideal population for the purposes of this study, it limits our ability to theorize more broadly about the career decisions and experiences of queer workers elsewhere. Recent work has noted the geographic variation not only in attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals but also with regard to discrimination these workers face on the job market (Tilcsik, Anteby and Knight 2015). Thus, the results of this study may not echo the experiences of queer workers elsewhere, especially in areas with less acceptance for LGBTQ individuals more broadly. Place may also be consequential in shaping ideas about work, and the interplay between work and identity. Given the longer work hours of professionals in New York City, it may be that respondents in my sample felt a greater need to integrate their work and non-work lives, and felt a greater need to be able to express in ways that felt authentic while at work. Future work should give greater attention to the wats in which place shapes work decisions and experiences.

Further, the results from this study likely would look different if I were looking at non-college educated queer men. First, it is likely that these men would have even less choice with regard to their career decisions, given the lack of a college education and a more constrained labor market. Thus, these men likely would have less ability to choose a career on the basis of their sexuality or prior experiences that were shaped by their sexuality. This may mean that non-college educated queer men face less accepting work organizations where they feel a need pass as straight or to engage in more constrained identity negotiations to offset the stigma attached to their sexuality. Future work should examine how queer men without a college education choose careers and experience the world of work.

This project highlights a number of avenues for future research. First, to better understand the career decision and labor market experiences of queer individuals, future research would likely benefit from following a cohort of queer young adults as they navigate college and enter the workforce. This would allow for a greater understanding of both how they understand their career decisions and how they think about and experience the labor market. Future research would also benefit from exploring how the career decisions and experiences of queer workers vary by geographic location. For example, do we see similar dynamics among queer workers in the southern United States or in non-urban areas? Such an analysis might highlight how location impacts the significance that sexuality takes on in the sphere of work. Lastly, research should continue to analyze diversity within LGBTQ+ populations. Instead of beginning with the assumption that sexuality meaningfully influences the decisions and experiences of queer individuals or assuming that those belonging to similar identity groups share similar experiences and similarly relate to their shared identity, future research would benefit from leaving this as an empirical question (Hill-Collins 1990; Somers 1994; Hill-Collins 2004; Moon 2012; Hamilton et al. 2020). This would allow us to understand not only *if* a certain identity takes on significance but also *for whom* and *why*.

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APPENDIX

Interview Guide

GROWING UP/GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Tell me a bit about yourself. Where did you grow up?
2. How was your experience going through school? Middle school? High school?
    a. Subjects that you were particularly passionate about
    b. What did you want to be when you were going through school?
3. Who did you live with growing up?
4. Can you describe the neighborhood that you grew up in?
    a. Do you have favorable memories?
5. Do you remember when you knew you were gay?
6. How did you know that you were gay?
7. What were some of your hobbies growing up?
8. Did you have an idea of what you wanted to be when you grew up?
    a. Why did you want to do this?
    b. Did this change at all?
9. Where did you go to college?
    a. Why did you pick this college?
    b. Were you part of any clubs or organizations in college?
10. What did you major in at college?
    a. Did this change at all? If so, why?
    b. Why did you choose this as your major?
    c. What were the biggest factors impacting your major decision?
11. Did you ever feel there were any challenges being gay in this major?
12. Do you think your sexuality impacted your major choice in any way?

CAREER DECISIONS

1. When you were forming an idea of what you wanted to be, what factors were most important to you?
2. How did you become interested in this?
2. Did family planning impact your career decisions at all? Providing for a family, etc.?
3. Did you ever think about how accepting certain occupations would be toward queer men?

4. Would you say that your sexuality was at all important in your career-related decisions or aspirations?

INTERVIEW PROCESS

1. Tell me about the jobs that you have had since college.
    A. Tell me about your current job
    B. How did you get it?
2. Did you try and signal your sexual orientation to potential employers? Did you apply to jobs that you thought would be accepting? What factors did you consider when applying for a job?
    A. How did you signal your sexual orientation?
    B. How did you cover your sexual orientation?
3. How was the interview process for your current job? Tell me a bit about the interview.
    a. Did you have anything in common with the interviewer? Did you feel as though there was a personality "match"? Why or why not?
4. . What about in regard to your race? Were there any notable differences in regard to how you were perceived as a person of color?

CURRENT WORKPLACE

1. Tell me about your job. What do you do on a day-to-day basis?
2. How is your relationship with your current and past co-workers? What about bosses?
3. How is it being a queer man in your workplace?
    a. What about being a queer person of color?
    b. Do you ever feel like you face specific stereotypes?
4. Have you ever been made to feel like you have to play up or tone down certain identity characteristics in the workplace?
    a. Specific examples
    b. Play up your gay identity/tone down Black identity?

5. What are the demographics of your workplace?
6. Are there other gay men? What about in leadership positions?
7. Do you feel like your co-workers or bosses see you as a valuable asset to your workplace?
8. How's your relationship with your coworkers? Who do you and do you not get along with?
9. How would you imagine your treatment in your workplace differs from that, of say a straight white man?
    a. What about a woman?
    b. A gay man of a different racial identity?
10. Have you ever witnessed any discrimination in your workplace, or either yourself or others?
    a. what did you do about it?
11. Does your workplace have a human resources department?
    a. How effective is it?
12. What about an employee resource group for LGBTQ individuals?
    a. Are you a part of it?
13. How could your workplace improve the experiences of its LGBTQ workers?
13. Do you plan to stay at your workplace?
14. What about in your career field?

15. Are you happy with your career choice?
16. If you were to go back to the first day of your undergrad, or even high school if you wanted to, what would you do differently, and what would you keep the same?

LAST QUESTIONS

1. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
1. Do you think most gay men think about their sexuality when making career decisions?
2. Research shows that gay men tend are concentrated in occupations that allow for greater autonomy, and those jobs that privilege skills such as being able to read others behavior. Why would you guess that is?

Table 1. List of Repondents by Group

Name	Group	Race	Age	Industry	Occupation
Martin	Consistently Bright	Hispanic	30	Financial Tech	Computer Programer
Paul	Consistently Bright	White	29	Theatre	Audition Coach
Louis	Consistently Bright	White	27	Theatre	Teacher/Dancer
Harry	Consistently Bright	White	35	Arts	Admin work
Douglass	Consistently Bright	White	31	Theatre	Performer
Nick	Consistently Bright	Hispanic	27	Tech	Consultant
Samuel	Consistently Bright	White	22	Theatre	Performer
Terry	Consistently Bright	Black/White	26	Theatre	Performer
Derrick	Consistently Bright	Black	30	Theatre	Performer
Chris	Consistently Bright	White	28	Theatre	Performer
Cayce	Consistently Bright	Asian	27	Public Health	Consultant
Tristan	Consistently Bright	White	25	Consulting	Consultant
Jerry	Dimmed Boundaries	White	23	Engineering	Chemical Engineer
Rohan	Dimmed Boundaries	Middle Eastern	26	Community Organizing	Social Worker
Francis	Dimmed Boundaries	Asian	26	Fashion	Marketing
Benjamin	Dimmed Boundaries	Hispanic	46	Community Organizing	Public Health Specialist
Jesse	Dimmed Boundaries	White	24	Arts	Photographer
Adam	Dimmed Boundaries	White	32	Education	Social Worker
Craig	Dimmed Boundaries	White	29	Tech	Customer Support Specialist
Matthew	Dimmed Boundaries	Hispanic	25	Public Health	Researcher
Davis	Dimmed Boundaries	White	28	Tech	Product Support Specialist
Sebastian	Dimmed Boundaries	Hispanic	28	Public Health	Researcher
Hector	Dimmed Boundaries	Hispanic	25	Media	Advertising
Wayne	Dimmed Boundaries	White	26	Marketing	Consultant
Ralph	Dimmed Boundaries	Asian	56	Non-Profits	Researcher
Keith	Dimmed Boundaries	White	26	Public Health	Consultant
Daniel	Dimmed Boundaries	Black	31	Tech	Technical Solutions Manager
David	Dimmed Boundaries	Black	31	Public Relations	Researcher/Communications Specialist
Peter	Dimmed Boundaries	White	32	Theatre	Researcher
Brian	Dimmed Boundaries	White	60	Real Estate	Director of Real Estate
Walter	Dimmed Boundaries	White	25	Tech	Customer Support Specialist
Gary	Dimmed Boundaries	White	29	Fashion	Store Designer
Scott	Dimmed Boundaries	White/Middle Eastern	25	Marketing	Content Marketing Manager
Marcus	Brightened Boundaries	Black	26	Law	Legal Assistant
Stanley	Brightened Boundaries	Black	26	STEM	Researcher
Sheldon	Brightened Boundaries	Black	25	Higher Education	Administrative Assistant
Lawrence	Brightened Boundaries	Black	24	Elementary Education	Teacher
Donovan	Brightened Boundaries	Black/Hispanic	33	Elementary Education	Teacher
Henry	Brightened Boundaries	White	49	Finance	Associate
Alejandro	Brightened Boundaries	Hispanic	24	Finance	Associate
Dennis	Brightened Boundaries	White	28	Business	Sales Representative
Diego	Brightened Boundaries	Hispanic	33	Business	IT and Recruitment Specialist
Lucas	Brightened Boundaries	Hispanic	27	Non-Profits	Researcher
Max	Brightened Boundaries	Hispanic	25	BioTech	Consultant
Sean	Brightened Boundaries	Black	31	Tech	Media Specialist
Greg	Brightened Boundaries	White	27	Education	Finance
Russell	Brightened Boundaries	Black	32	Business	Client Specialist
Bruno	Brightened Boundaries	Hispanic	29	Law	Paralegal
Elijah	Brightened Boundaries	Black	30	Fashion	Store Manager
Jordan	Brightened Boundaries	Black	35	Fashion	Publicist
Will	Brightened Boundaries	Hispanic	36	Public Health	Director of Data Services
Neil	Never Bright	Middle Eastern	30	Housing	City Planner
Jason	Never Bright	Hispanic	32	Finance	Administration
Damain	Never Bright	Middle Eastern	34	Fashion	Designer
Patrick	Never Bright	White	52	Advertising	Media Specialist
Jose	Never Bright	Hispanic	22	Finance	Accounting
Ryan	Never Bright	White	22	Finance	Consultant
Jack	Never Bright	White	47	Media	Marketing Manager
Carl	Never Bright	White	28	Higher Education	Greek Life Advisor
Roy	Never Bright	Hispanic	31	Tech	Software Engineer
Alan	Never Bright	White	26	Financial Tech	Data Analyst
Randy	Never Bright	White	30	Tech	Software Engineer
Jaylen	Never Bright	Black	31	Law	Lawyer
Cameron	Never Bright	White	26	Healthcare	IT Specialist
Tommy	Never Bright	Hispanic	23	Hospitality	Waitor/Bartender
Brad	Never Bright	White	32	Military	Staff Sargeant
Bob	Never Bright	White	29	Healh Services	Physical Therapist

Table 2. List of Respondents Grouped by Race

Race	Name	Group	Age	Industry	Occupation
White	Paul	Consistently Bright	29	Theatre	Audition Coach
White	Louis	Consistently Bright	27	Theatre	Teacher/Dancer
White	Harry	Consistently Bright	35	Arts	Admin work
White	Douglass	Consistently Bright	31	Theatre	Performer
White	Samuel	Consistently Bright	22	Theatre	Performer
White	Chris	Consistently Bright	28	Theatre	Performer
White	Tristan	Consistently Bright	25	Consulting	Consultant
White	Jerry	Consistently Bright	23	Engineering	Chemical Engineer
White	Jesse	Dimmed Boundaries	24	Art	Photographer
White	Adam	Dimmed Boundaries	32	Education	Social Worker
White	Craig	Dimmed Boundaries	29	Tech	Customer Support Specialist
White	Davis	Dimmed Boundaries	28	Tech	Product Support Specialist
White	Wayne	Dimmed Boundaries	26	Marketing	Consultant
White	Keith	Dimmed Boundaries	26	Public Health	Consultant
White	Peter	Dimmed Boundaries	32	Theatre	Researcher
White	Brian	Dimmed Boundaries	60	Real Estate	Director of Real Estate
White	Walter	Dimmed Boundaries	25	Tech	Customer Support Specialist
White	Gary	Dimmed Boundaries	29	Fashion	Store Designer
White	Henry	Brightened Boundaries	49	Finance	Associate
White	Dennis	Brightened Boundaries	28	Business	Sales Representative
White	Greg	Brightened Boundaries	27	Education	Finance
White	Patrick	Never Brightened	52	Advertising	Media Specialist
White	Ryan	Never Brightened	22	Finance	Consultant
White	Jack	Never Brightened	47	Media	Marketing Manager
White	Carl	Never Brightened	28	Higher Education	Greek Life Advisor
White	Alan	Never Brightened	26	Finance/Tech	Data Analytics
White	Randy	Never Brightened	30	Tech	Software Engineer
White	Cameron	Never Brightened	26	Healthcare	IT Specialist
White	Brad	Never Brightened	32	Military	Staff Sargeant
White	Bob	Never Brightened	29	Health	Physical Therapist
Hispanic	Martin	Consistently Bright	30	Financial Tech	Computer Programmer
Hispanic	Nick	Consistently Bright	27	Tech	Consultant
Hispanic	Benjamin	Dimmed Boundaries	46	Community Organizing	Public Health Specialist
Hispanic	Matthew	Dimmed Boundaries	25	Public Health	Researcher
Hispanic	Sebastian	Dimmed Boundaries	28	Public Health	Researcher
Hispanic	Hector	Dimmed Boundaries	25	Media	Advertising
Hispanic	Alejandry	Brightened Boundaries	24	Finance	Associate
Hispanic	Diego	Brightened Boundaries	33	Business	IT and Recruitment Specialist
Hispanic	Lucas	Brightened Boundaries	27	Non-profits	Researcher
Hispanic	Max	Brightened Boundaries	25	BioTech	Consultant
Hispanic	Bruno	Brightened Boundaries	29	Law	Paralegal
Hispanic	Will	Brightened Boundaries	36	Public Health	Director of Data Services
Hispanic	Jason	Never Brightened	32	Finance	Administration
Hispanic	Jose	Never Brightened	22	Finance	Accounting
Hispanic	Roy	Never Brightened	31	Tech	Software Engineer
Hispanic	Tommy	Never Brightened	23	Service	Waitor/Bartender
Black	Derrick	Consistently Bright	30	Theatre	Performer
Black	Daniel	Dimmed Boundaries	31	Tech	Technical Solutions Manager
Black	David	Dimmed Boundaries	31	Public Relations	Researcher/Communications Specialist
Black	Marcus	Brightened Boundaries	26	Law	Legal Assistant
Black	Stanley	Brightened Boundaries	26	STEM	Researcher
Black	Sheldon	Brightened Boundaries	25	Higher Education	Administrative Assistant
Black	Lawrence	Brightened Boundaries	24	Elementary Education	Teacher
Black	Sean	Brightened Boundaries	31	Tech	Media Specialist
Black	Russell	Brightened Boundaries	32	Business	Client Specialist
Black	Elijah	Brightened Boundaries	30	Fashion	Store Manager
Black	Scott	Brightened Boundaries	35	Fashion	Publicist
Black	Jaylen	Never Brightened	31	Law	Lawyer
Asian	Cayce	Consistently Bright	27	Public Health	Consultant
Asian	Francis	Dimmed Boundaries	26	Fashion	Marketing
Asian	Ralph	Dimmed Boundaries	56	Non-profits	Researcher
South Asian	Rohan	Dimmed Boundaries	26	Community Organizing	Social Worker
South Asian	Neil	Never Brightened	30	Housing	City Planner
South Asian	Damian	Never Brightened	34	Fashion	Designer
Mixed-Race	Terry	Consistently Bright	26	Theatre	Performer
Mixed-Race	Scott	Dimmed Boundaries	25	Marketing	Content Marketing Manager
Mixed-Race	Donovan	Brightened Boundaries	33	Elementary Education	Teacher