

Running head: Fag hags no more: Understanding millennial straight women's heterosexual authorship, allyhood, and friendships with gay men.

Fag hags no more:
Understanding millennial straight women's heterosexual authorship, allyhood, and friendships with gay men.

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Acknowledgment and Dedication

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Abstract

The emergence of the “gay best friend” demonstrates a shift in how straight women in the millennial generation view, interact with, and understand gay identity. This thesis investigates how college age straight women understand their identities as straight women and allies, and their friendship with gay men. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and analyzed using grounded theory ($n = 20$). A theme of “heterosexual authorship” emerged, illustrating how heterosexual consciousness and self-authorship are connected to the various degrees in which participants form their heterosexual identity around anti-heterosexist values. Allyhood also emerged as an important theme with all participants reporting some desire to be an ally to their gay friend. Analysis of these friendship pairs showed that the gay friend is integrated into the straight culture of the straight women. Participants in this study did not report negative social stigma, unlike straight women with gay friends in previous studies. This suggests straight women are interacting across sexual orientation and gender in a way that is now normalized. And yet, these friendships are not pushing boundaries of sexual orientation and gender, instead they are reproducing and reinforcing heterosexism and sexism in new ways.

Keywords: Heterosexual authorship, identity development, allyhood, straight women, gay men, millennial

Loving friendship provides us with a space to experience the joy of community in a relationship where we learn to process all our issues, to cope with differences and conflict while staying connected – bell hooks

Friendships are important site for understanding straight women's relationships with gay men, and the larger community these friendships represent and create. The friends of gay men are especially important to understand because gay culture, unlike race or class, does not always occur in familial units. Instead gay people are scattered throughout our culture and often their friends are the first place for them to build community around their identity (Nardi & Sherrard, 1994). As gay people form these communities make friends, understanding and acceptance of gay identity spreads (Herek 1987; Herek & Capitanio, 1996, 1999). In the past twenty years the polls in support of gay rights have only been going up (Kohut et al., 2010). A recent Pew research study found that knowing someone who is gay is reported as the top reason for changing beliefs around gay marriage (Dimock et al., 2013). As the gay marriage movement continues to have momentum, qualitative research around interpersonal friendships can document the micro-level of these larger social shifts, potentially answering questions around *how* views are changing.

When we examine straight women with gay friends in the millennial generation (those born 1980s to 2000s), we are looking at a group of women who have only seen this acceptance of gay culture increase. Simultaneously, pop culture has shown more and more examples of friendships between straight women and gay men. From the quintessential Will and Grace to the younger Rachel and Kurt from *Glee* these pairings are becoming commonplace. These pop culture friendships are developing a prototype of these friendships as fashionable and fun but also deeply committed to one another. Studying relationships between gay men and straight

women (hereafter GMSW) outside the media can help answer if and how these friendships are becoming normalized.

There is no current research on millennial GMSW friendships despite the prevalence of these friendships and changes in views around gay rights in the last few years. Scholars have studied the relationships between gay men and straight women, but few to the best of my knowledge none have intentionally focused on straight women (Nardi & Sherrod 1994; Grigoriou, 2004; Moon 1995). Throughout this thesis, I will examine the experiences of straight women and their relationships with close friends who identify as gay men. Placing straight women at the center shifts the conversation to examine the privilege they hold in these relationships as heterosexuals and the oppression intertwined in these relationships as a result of male gender privilege.

This thesis will analyze semi-structured interviews with college-age straight women (n=20) on their identity and relationship with gay friends. I am interested in understanding whether these relationships can be a site for transformative change around gender and sexual orientation. This thesis will also consider the ways in which GMSW relationships may be a place to unlearn gender and shift power relations in our society but also risk reapplying and reinforcing sexism and heterosexism. The cross identities present in these relationships will also be investigated as a potential backdrop for allyhood. My objective is to investigate three different queries within this main question. First, I want to explore how straight women with gay friends make meaning of and construct their identity as straight women. Second, I want to understand how straight women with gay friends are motivated to be allies to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and

queer people¹. Last, I want to consider how these friendships interact with heterosexism and sexism. GMSW relationships can reveal how those with straight privilege and gender oppression build interpersonal relationships across sexual orientation and gender identity. Listening to these straight women is a starting point to understand new ways we can relate across gender and sexual orientation.

Identity Development

How straight women think about their gender and sexual orientation is integrally connected to how they feel and act in relationships across social identity. I will use self-authorship theory and heterosexual consciousness research to examine how participants come to understand their identity. Intersectionality will be applied to identity models to form a broader conceptualization of what it means to be a straight woman even though sexual orientation and gender will be the focus of this study.

Self-Authorship Models

Self-authorship is a mechanism through which individuals frame their experience and construct their reactions to the world (Kegan, 1994; Baxter Magolda, 1992, 1999; Baxter Magolda et. al 2008). Participants move from “uncritically accepting beliefs, values, and interpersonal loyalties” from other people to being the controller of their beliefs, values and social relations while critically considering other people’s point of view through self-reflection and interaction (Baxter Magolda et. al, 2008, p. 53). The concept of self-authorship can best be

¹ A limitation of this study is not addressing transgender identity. This study temporarily frames gender identity as a binary (woman, man) in order to have a focused examination of the sexism and heterosexism present in GMSW relationships, utilizing a categorical methodology (McCall, 2005). The sexism, and heterosexism experienced by transgender people overlaps the type that takes place in GMSW relationships, but is distinct and will not be covered in the scope of this study. More research is needed around how straight women, straight allies, and women are conscious surrounding transgender identity and supportive of transgender people.

explained by thinking of an individual as a ball of clay (Mezaros, 2007, p.11). This ball is constantly formed by messages from family, friends, religious institutions, schools, legal systems and other social systems. For individuals with external self-authorship, these outside sources shape them and they are not active in also constructing their own identity. This contrasts individuals with internal self-authorship who continually go back to “the potter’s wheel” and use their own hands to shape themselves. Although external sources still are very influential, individuals with an internal self-authorship have a strong internal value system to guide how they reflect, develop, and grow. Self-authorship assists in understanding the process of building an internal belief system over time to guide how one lives their life (Baxter Magdola et. al, 2008). I will use self-authorship theory to understand how participants take in and consider external messages. I am not directly interested in the external or internal construction of straight women’s identities. Instead, I will use this framework to reveal the ways straight women in this present study conform to or resist messages about what it means to be a straight woman.

Susan Jones and Elisa Abes (2004) found that self-authorship was promoted through the challenging environments of community service settings. A combination of focus groups, surveys, and individual interviews were analyzed revealing that during volunteer experiences students were confronted with their own privilege and the existence of oppression. This suggests that certain events can trigger self-reflection around identity and may be applicable to the experience of forming a friendship across difference. In this present study, I will strive to answer if forming a friendship across difference promotes reflection around one’s identity.

Self-authorship theory also offers perspective on how we think others view us influences how we view ourselves (Jones, 2009). Susan Jones (2009) applied self-authorship with an intersectional analysis of identity to explore the role of power and privilege in how individuals

come to know who they are. Through this model, participants in her study considered how they form relationships with others, and privilege and oppression within their own identity (Jones, 2009). Students of color were found to consider other people's views about their identity frequently (Jones, 2009). By contrast, white students had more internal construction of self and little regard for how others might see them (Jones, 2009). Jones (2009) included no mention of whether sexual orientation and gender influence construction of identity. In this current study, I will consider if the way straight women predict how others view them influences how they conform or resist heterosexist messages, remaining cognizant of whether or not racial identity is a contributing factor to any difference in resistance to messages.

Social psychologists and sociologists have called social subjectivity of one imagining how they might be understood by someone else, "the looking glass self" (Cooley, 1902). Cooley's conceptualization of this self-concept had three important parts: first you imagine how you look to others, then you imagine how others judge you, and finally you develop a sense of your self through those judgments (Cooley, 1902). The looking glass self will serve as a backdrop to understand how straight women in this study develop their identity in the context of social interactions and perceived judgments.

Finally, self-authorship has been found to influence not only how individuals view themselves but also how they view others and the world (Baxter Magolda et. al, 2008). This study strived to demonstrate the way people challenge information influenced how they approached and interpreted experiences (Baxter Magolda et. al, 2008). Participants from this study with strong self-authorship viewed knowledge as contextual rather than a guaranteed truth and were able to consider other's perspectives without being consumed by them (Baxter Magolda et. al, 2008, p. 49). At the same many participants in this study rarely critiqued

knowledge, perceiving it to be always be certain. In the present study, I hope to show the variety of ways straight women interpret heterosexist messages as something to be reinterpreted or unquestionable facts.

Understanding of Heterosexual Identity

As we understand how straight women make meaning of their identity, it is important to examine the ways straight women think about how heterosexuality grants them privilege. A recent study of straight college students found that heterosexuality is not something thought about often unless people interact with gay or lesbian identified people (Mueller & Cole, 2008). The lack of heterosexual consciousness was referred to as “heteroinvisibility”, where heterosexuality is felt as something so normalized in the lives of these college students it is not noticeable (Mueller & Cole, 2008). This coincides with the finding that many students define being heterosexual as being not homosexual rather than on its own qualifications (Mueller & Cole, 2008). So, although straight college students may have some awareness of their heterosexuality, this research demonstrates they do not construct what it means to be straight without juxtaposing it to non-straight identities.

Mohr (2002) found that a person is motivated to define their identity based on social acceptance or an internal “psychological consistency” (Mohr, 2002). Mohr (2002) also used four working models of sexual orientation to describe the ways heterosexual identity is understood in adults: democratic, compulsory, politicized, and integrated. Mohr described each person, as having a one dominant working model but it is possible to have several at once. While the integrative and politicized models consider heterosexism, the compulsory and democratic working models do not. Those with politicized models saw “sociopolitical ramifications of sexual orientation identity” (Mohr, 2002, p. 544) while those with integrative model saw sexual

orientation as a complex construct within an oppressive structure. This contrasts those with democratic model who did not see meaningful difference in life experience of people with different sexual orientation, and those with a compulsory model who saw heterosexuality as the only option. This research helps frame the ways that straight women may or may not see larger structures of heterosexism in their identity development, as well as whether outward acceptance or internal thought process drive how participants think about their heterosexual identity.

Intersectionality in Identity Development

Intersectionality offers a framework to consider multiple identities and power and privilege as a result of these identities. Morgan McCall's categorical methodology makes social identity groups a conscious part of the analysis (McCall, 2005). Categorical methodology centers on how we form and understand categories in our day-to-day life rather than rejecting how categories are constructed or focusing on the intersections (McCall, 2005). The formation and maintenance of categories helps understand differences within and across identity groups. This is not to say that the categories of man, woman, straight, and gay are static and/or homogeneous. Instead it acknowledges that depending on one's membership to these categories (and the combination of them) you will have a different amount of power and privilege. This framework is appropriate for research around straight women and gay men because it consciously considers relationships of inequity among groups.

Although McCall (2005) frames categorical methodology as a distinct type of intersectional methodology, I also consider how intracategorical identity models contribute to understanding multiple identities of individuals. Intracategorical methodology focuses on the intersections, usually around particular social group whose identities are at the margins. This model stems from black feminists in the Combahee River Collective who conceived of an

intersectional analysis that examined their interlocking oppressions as black women (Combahee River Collective, 1997). This intersectionality framework pushed back against the assumption that the lives of black women were the additive experience of a white woman and a black man, because the intersection of race and gender became the focus of analysis (Crenshaw, 1993). Efforts to focus on one identity at a time provide a limited view of a person (Museus & Griffin, 2011). When I talk with straight women about their identities I will remain conscious to how multiple identities, especially those outside gender and sexual orientation, overlap and intertwine to yield a variety of lived experiences.

More recent research has applied intersectionality to identities that hold privilege, like whiteness and middle-classness (Rasky, 2011). Privileged identities were found to shift how other identities were experienced. For example, Cynthia Levine-Rasky found women of color better able to challenge and resist oppression when they held class privilege. Rasky did not examine gender or sexual orientation, but it can be speculated that the experience of these identities shifts depending on other privileged identities as well. As a researcher I will consider the weight of privilege and power in multiple identities within larger structures of oppression.

Locating interlocking gender binaries

To better understand the relationships of GMSW, sexism and heterosexism must be understood not only as two driving forces that impact interpersonal relationships but also as social structures that influence the lives of straight women and gay men. Adrienne Rich's interpretation of heterosexuality as compulsory gives important context to current research on heterosexuality in college (Rich, 1980). Judith Butler's interpretation of imitation and gender insubordination also helps examine how heterosexuality is one of the main instruments both women and men learn to embody gender (Butler, 1993).

Heterosexuality as an institution in the college environment

Adrienne Rich (1980) argues that heterosexuality is an institution that disempowers women and needs to be challenged. In order to do this heterosexuality needs to be seen as a political institution and not merely a “personal experience”. Rich (1980) raises concern that a heterosexual woman’s continued alienation and disregard of lesbian women gives more power to heterosexuality that hurts all women. This heterosexual mandate is found in current literature on heterosexual college aged women (Thompson & Morgan, 2008; Hamilton, 2007). Rich’s theory helps unravel how straight women may not recognize the compulsory nature of heterosexuality.

Women’s participation in heterosexuality during the first year of college was found to be essential for acceptance by other women (Hamilton, 2007). Women’s ability to get attention from men was valuable; a same gender hierarchy was structured around embodying a femininity that would appeal to men (Hamilton, 2007). Therefore, heteronormativity shaped the expectation of how women should perform gender, and any deviation was punished with social exclusion (Hamilton, 2007). The social distance shown to lesbians by their heterosexual peers offered a strong example of lesbian marginalization and homophobia among straight women (Hamilton, 2007). The reinforcement of heterosexuality demonstrates how it was not seen as a structural system to challenge. In the present study, I will explore if participants recognize heterosexuality as a structure that promotes homophobia and hinders their own gender performance.

Even though straight women in college socially penalized lesbians, same-sex eroticism was often performed between straight women without penalty. Straight women justified these same-sex acts by pointing to alcohol consumption and the assumption that it was not sexual (Hamilton, 2007). These straight women danced with other straight women as a means to gain attention from men (Ronen, 2010) and also reported kissing other straight women as something

that is “not serious” and performed for an audience of heterosexual men (Hamilton, 2007). Considering that straight women do not claim to have a sexual interest in these acts and only perform them in front of men, it seems that women’s sexuality is directed by what men enjoy, rather than what straight women would desire for themselves. Other straight women approve of these acts, because they signal participation in the heteronormative erotic market. This dynamic demonstrates that heteronormative expectations can influence the development of college-aged straight women’s sexual orientation to favor male desire. I hope to explore if participants report heteronormative expectations influencing how they think about their sexual orientation.

The lack of space to diverge from heteronormativity can also be found in a lack of subtypes of sexual identity. When given the option on a survey, one in ten college women identified as “mostly straight” (Thompson & Morgan, 2008). The complexity of sexual identity is overlooked when we don’t examine sexual relationships, sexual attraction and sexual fantasy. “Mostly straight” served as a category for women who felt that they were straight but also somewhat attracted to people of their same gender (Thompson & Morgan, 2008). Exploration and uncertainty were common processes during identity development of “mostly straight” women, often due to their openness to but difficulty in finding a label for their identity (Thompson & Morgan, 2008). The “mostly straight” category has the potential to fill the gaps in the sexual orientation spectrum, but is not viewed as a viable option. Rich would argue that heterosexuality is not just how most people identify as but “imposed, managed, organized, propagandized, and maintained by force” (Rich, 1980, p.27) Limited labeling of identity will be noted as one of the many ways heterosexuality as an institution influences the identity and actions of women in this current study.

Constraints of Gay Identity Development

Heterosexuality is one of the main instruments both women and men learn to use to embody gender, through initial gender socialization but also day-to-day enforcement of hegemonic heteronormativity. Many sexual identity development models are framed as a shift from heterosexual to gay (Cass, 1984; Stevens 2004). Vivienne Cass (1984) proposed an identity development model that theorizes that individuals' awareness, acceptance, and integration of gay identity are not necessarily linear. Overall, individuals in her study were socialized to be heterosexual and then through various life stages (that took different amounts of time and often would be revisited) developed their gay identity. Understanding how gay male friends in this current study may have been socialized to be heterosexual can help explain how they may have been primed with heterosexist and sexist expectations of women. As a result, sexist and heterosexist expectations may or may not interact in GMSW relationships in this current study in various ways.

At the same time, it is important to be critical of the notion that gay and lesbian identity is an inversion and/or complete shift of straight identity. Talking about gay identity development in constant contrast to a heterosexual "norm" frames gay identity as passively determined by heterosexuality. Judith Butler's notion that "gender is an imitation for which there is no original" helps us consider that ways gay and lesbian identity is influenced by heterosexist structures but is not merely a deviation from what is currently considered normal (Butler, 1993, p.313). Judith Butler sees sexual identity categories as a symptom of oppressive structures because they have the power to name what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. Butler's critical lens around gender imitation will be used in this present study to analyze the ways straight women talk about their gay friend's identity. Specifically, I will be interested in if straight women think of their friends as the opposite or "inversion" of straight men or view them on as a unique individuals.

Richard Stevens (2004) also found the process of gay identity development as ongoing and in constant conflict with heterosexist norms within the college environments. Although the college environment was reported to be a safer space to explore their gay identity (in comparison to home-towns), men often reported a lack of diversity of gay identity expression. One gay man stated that he did not know any other gays except the “very, very obvious ones” (Stevens, 2004, p. 193). Gay men who act flamboyant and feminine were reported to be more visible in these college campuses, reinforcing a certain expectation of gay identity performance (Stevens, 2004). Often gay men felt pressure to fit this mold (Stevens, 2004). This expression was perceived to be a more “normal” expression of gay identity but was still stigmatized. This demonstrates how gay men who are “obvious” are oppressed, as well as the men of color and other gay men who feel excluded because their gay gender performance is considered different. I will consider how straight women in this current study may play a role in reinforcing a certain type of gay gender performance through their expectations and stereotypes of what being gay must look like.

Research surrounding the contact hypothesis has shown exposure to those different than you can influence one to have fewer prejudices (Herek 1987; Herek & Capitanio, 1996, 1999). Gregory Herek and John Capitanio found that those with more relationships, close relationships, and hearing direct disclosure of someone’s sexual orientation were more open to gay identity (Herek & Capitanio, 1999). Gregory Herek and John Capitanio also found that when people did not have relationships with gays or lesbians they base their opinions on stereotypes (Herek and Capitanio, 1999). Before developing a relationship with their gay male friend, many participants may have based their opinions on stereotypes.

Although increased contact with gay culture may decrease prejudice, straight women pose a threat to queer spaces. Gay bars have historically served as a designated space for the

LGBTQ community to gather openly (Manalansan, 1995). Mark Casey (2004) explored how straight women's presence in gay bars and other queer spaces with their gay friends affect issues of comfort and inclusion for lesbians and some gay men. Straight women usually enter the space because they know they will not be hit on by any straight men (Castro-Convers, 2005). But, the expression of heterosexual female sexuality and hyper-femininity makes lesbians feel like the space is not theirs (Casey, 2004). While straight women can escape uncomfortable situations with straight men, lesbians reported having fewer alternatives to escape when straight women (and their evaluative judgment and threat) enter one of the few spaces designated for them (Casey, 2004). Gay men often are the ones bringing straight women into these spaces (Moon, 1995). As a result, straight women and gay men together are reinforcing this type of femininity in these spaces. At the same time, some gay men reported that straight women pose a problem for gay communities by entering in designated gay spaces. One man saying, "you have the whole world, I have this crummy bar, get out!" (Moon, 1995, p. 492). Moon (1995) questioned how an assumed community of gays masks inequalities within. For Moon, this narrow naming of who is impacted by sexual persecution may be useful in the short-term mobilization but a larger group of contributors is needed for liberation (Moon 1995). To better understand the complications of straight women crossing boundaries into "gay communities" in this current generation, it will be necessary to hear from the straight women themselves what they feel they stand to gain from entering non-straight spaces, and any positive or negative consequences they report as a result of their presences in these spaces.

Crossing Boundaries as Fag-Hags, Family, and Couples

How straight women relate across gender in GMSW relationships, other friendships, and romantic relationships will be important to understand the ways in which sexism and

heterosexism influence these relationships. The way straight women in this current study feel around their gay friend is influenced by how they think it might be different or similar to their other relationships. Additionally, understanding previous studies on GSMW will help highlight ways these relationships have functioned that the millennial GSMW relationships may continue to follow or shift away from.

As I explore the friendships between GSMW I want to examine how this cross-gender, cross-sexual orientation relationship is perceived and named by straight women to understand how these relationships exist in many forms. The term fag hag specifically comes to mind as a label for straight women who are friends with gay men. A fag hag is loosely defined as a straight woman who spends a lot of time with gay men (Moon, 1995). Dawne Moon interviewed gay and bisexual men on the term *fag hag* and how they feel straight women interact with the gay community (Moon, 1995). Although there is occasional self-defining of fag hags, the concept is generally projected by gay men rather than self-described by straight women. More often than not, there were negative connotations to the term including that these straight women were ugly and lonely, and therefore they would hang out with gay men to fill the void from being excluded from heterosexual dating. Participants in Moon's study were born between 1927 and 1978, representing a wide range of culture, but no one represented the millennial generation. This current study will seek to document what type of language the millennial generation is using to describe straight women in these friendships.

Research on cross-gender relationships has demonstrated that women have less to gain when forming relationships with men (Rose, 1985). Suzanna Rose examined cross-gender relationships and found that men sought to establish friendships due to sexual attraction (Rose, 1985). Once friendships were established (often after one or both people did not wish to pursue

anything more), men found cross-gender friendships to function very similarly to their other friendships. However, women found that cross-gender friendships were less loyal, accepting, and intimate (Rose, 1985). Rose's study did not survey the sexual orientation of participants, so it's unclear how sexual identity influenced the cross-gender friendships surveyed. When sexual attraction is not as salient in the friendship, women feel less threatened by the formation of cross-gender friendships, both in being pursued to be friends and pursuing new friendships (Grigoriou, 2004). Straight women conceive of their friendship with gay men as a safe space to feel comfortable with men (Grigoriou, 2004). This contrasts Rose's (1985) findings and may demonstrate how GMSW relationships are challenging patterns found in other cross-gender relationships. Women reported valuing their friendships with gay men because they felt comfortable talking about anything (Grigoriou, 2004). The level of trust and companionship demonstrates how important gay men's friendships are to straight women. The current study will investigate what straight women feel they have to gain from forming friendships with gay men.

In addition to being classified as friends, GMSW have often been framed as "couples without sex" or pseudo heterosexual couples (Grigoriou, 2004). Normative notions in society build a cultural script for how men and women interact with one another (Wong et al., 1999). This script relies on the assumption that when men and women interact there is always the possibility of sex and/or romance. GMSW relationships are an opportunity for men and women to engage with one another without worry that the friendship will develop into something romantic. At the same time these erotic interactions (i.e. kissing, touching, holding hands) between a man and a woman are normal and accepted due to hegemonic heterosexuality. This provides a platform for GMSW to have erotic undertones without question or critique.

Sara Maitland described how constant hugging and touching was mutual with her gay friend (Maitland, 1991). She made it clear that physical interaction was intertwined in their emotional closeness (Maitland, 1991). Nardi and Sherrod's research found that men, both gay and straight, view sex as a way to achieve intimacy (Nardi & Sherrod, 1994). Although women were not highlighted in this study, it is possible that for most people erotic interactions bring them closer to someone. Sheppard et al. conducted interviews with GMSW friendships and found that friendships were reported as asexual despite undertones of flirtation (Sheppard et al., 2010). There is a gap in the current language to describe sexuality that does not pursue sex. Even though she and her gay friend enjoyed acting like a couple in public when people asked they were quick to clarify they were *not* together (Maitland, 1991). It's possible that when sexuality and gender are obscured there is greater potential for erotic interactions among friends, which may increase feelings of closeness. This current study will investigate how straight women perceive touching in their friendships with gay men.

In addition to acting like romantic couples, GMSW relationships provide a place for women to feel sexy around men. Women who were close with many gay men reported feeling more sexually attractive than women who were not (Bartlett et al., 2009). Even though gay men are not pursuing sex with their straight friends, their opinion of female beauty is shown to boost how sexy a woman feels. The ways in which straight women report feeling attractive as a result of their gay friend will be examined in this study.

Most studies on GMSW friendships have not been from the perspectives of straight women, and no study has focused exclusively on the millennial generation. Understanding how this demographic of straight women defines themselves in the context of their friendships with gay men will add to the current understanding of these friendships.

Social Change and Allyhood

The closeness and cross-identities present in GMSW friendships create a platform for allyhood surrounding gender and sexual orientation. Throughout my thesis I will conceptualize allyhood as a process where members of a privileged group are cognizant of their privilege and strive to support members of an oppressed group, using sexual orientation as the main lens (Broido, 2000; Edwards, 2006). Current literature on allyhood and coalition models will be used to frame how participants feel they support their gay friend and what they feel their role should be in broader social change movements.

Keith Edwards (2006) investigated a person's motivation for supporting members of an oppressed social group. Edward envisions motivation falling under three broad categories: personal, as in helping a specific friend, altruistic as in giving to others, and for social justice a desire to change systemic oppression that will benefit self and others. Participants who frame their sense of allyhood for a specific individual or altruistically risk maintaining power relations. Those who are allies for social justice work with rather than for an individual or group and see interconnectedness in various forms of oppression in hopes of fighting for a joint liberation. Edwards (2006) felt the motivations to be an ally is tied to the self-interest of an individual. The continuum of self-interest, ranging from "me" and my own interest, to "you and me" relational self-interest, to "us" interdependent self-interest, demonstrates a wide range in how one can relate to members of an oppressed group (Goodman, 2000; Edwards, 2006). Edwards (2006) argues the means by which we bring about social change are just as important as the end result. Although the most genuine naming of an ally for social justice comes from members of the oppressed group, I will look to see how participants describe what allyhood means to them and frame their understanding within Edwards.

Worthington developed a heterosexual identity development model that considered how this identity is both an individual identity with sexual need, values, modes of expressions but also a social identity with group membership and attitudes toward sexual minorities (Worthington, 2002). The development of heterosexual identity as described by Worthington is a process of active exploration but also diffusion in which one does not feel a strong sense of self-understanding. Individuals deepen their commitment and then synthesize their “individual sexual identity, group membership identity, and attitudes toward sexual minorities into an overall sexual self-concept” (Worthington, 2002, p. 519). The current study focuses heterosexuality as a social identity but will use Worthington’s model to consider the path to synthesis multiple components of identity.

Jordan (2012) combined Edwards’ and Worthington’s allyhood models to create a new model, HAID, that demonstrated how heterosexual allies acknowledge and accept one’s privilege and well as recognize their group membership. This model helps explain how heterosexual allies place them in a larger context of group identity as allies. It also demonstrated how allies can have unexplored commitment and revisit Edwards’ various motivations (e.g. ally for friend, ally for social justice, etc.) at different points in their life. This model can serve as another example of heterosexual ally development in this current study.

Broido (2000) also designed a model of social justice ally development in college. Broido (2000) studied six white heterosexual students on their path to allyhood. In this model, participants were found entering college attitudinally congruent with social justice values, and through three major components (increased information on social justice issues, engagement in meaning-making processes, and self-confidence) developed a willingness to be allies. This study also highlighted college as an experience that encourages reflection around social justice issues.

Attitudes and information available to participants in the current study will be considered as factors that may influence ally development.

Personal relationships with LGB people have been shown to motivate allyhood development (Herek & Capitanio, 1996; Herek & Glunt, 1993). Heterosexual adults who have had more interpersonal contact with gay men and lesbians tend to have more positive feelings toward gay men and lesbians they do not know personally (Herek & Capitanio, 1996). Glenda Russell (2011) also found that straight allies are motivated by either fundamental principles (e.g. justice, civil rights) or by personal experiences (e.g. family, building relationships transforming own guilt/anger). Both motivations serve as an internal motivation, but it is helpful to see the ways we frame internal motivation as either related to broad values or more concrete personal gains, and relationships. In this current study I will attempt to reveal the ways, if any, that straight women are motivated to be allies.

Cathy Cohen (1997) also would argue that the threads between oppressions allow for a more nuanced understanding of allyhood. Cohen rejects traditional queer politics that create a dichotomy of heterosexuals and “everything queer” (Cohen, 1997). Instead, Cohen argues we need to collapse our understanding of queer to create joint political project that includes more individuals who are in other ways negatively affected by the current status quo of sexuality (e.g. bulldaggers and welfare queens) (Cohen, 1997).

Dawne Moon (1995) also advocated for a movement based on shared stake in liberation rather than on the basis of identities that are shaped by dominant discourse. If we fail to become allies for social change that build coalitions we risk participating in the “oppression Olympics”, where we compete rather than collaborate for liberation (Martinez, 1993) As Adrienne Rich has articulated, a gender-centered analysis inhibits us from fully confronting the oppression we face

if we ignore sexuality. The struggle against heterosexism needs to be a priority if we as straight women want to see progress. It will be important to see if GMSW can be the site for this type of coalition considering the oppression straight women face at the intersection of their gender and sexual orientation that could be liberated by anti-heterosexism work.

Methodology

Recruitment

My intended sample for this study was straight women in the millennial generation, in their college years, who report they have a close gay friend. Four requirements needed to be met for a participant to qualify for the study the participant (1) must be between the ages of 18 and 25, (2) the participant had to identify as a straight/heterosexual woman (3) the participant must have at least one close gay male friend for at least one year who is 18-25 (4) the participant must be willing to participate in a 45-75 minute audio-taped interview. Previous studies on friendships have used one year of being close friends as a benchmark (Nardi & Sherrod 1994). This time frame of friendship was required to guarantee participants have substantial experiences to draw from about their friendships. In the present study, participants and their friends had to be between the ages of 18-25 to capture people in the millennial generation who are currently or have recently been in college.

College as a specific time period is an inherently classist and racist construct that is inaccessible to many people (especially non-U.S. citizens and lower class people). In the present study, all participants attended elite universities, which have sets of values and perspectives that are not representative in all colleges and therefore not representative of all millennial straight women in college. I limited my sample by focusing on this specific context and the type of straight and gay culture with which these participants are interacting. Although this strategy provides a limited view of GMSW friendships, it allowed for a more in-depth analysis of the specifics of these friendships in their context. Further research is needed to explore the many GMSW friendships that do not fit this environment.

Email was the primary form of recruitment. A form email (see Appendix A) included information about the study and contact information (i.e. email and phone) to sign up for a

confidential interview. This email was sent to coordinators of undergraduate departments in the liberal arts college (e.g. Psychology, History) including every ethnic studies department (e.g. East Asian Studies), honors thesis classes, and introductory women's studies class. These specific groups were solicited first because they were loosely connected to my network and willing to forward an email on behalf of an honors student. This solicitation consequently limited participants to mostly upper-class social science students from the University of Michigan. It is interesting to note that 55% of the participants ($n=11$) were currently in or had taken at least one Women's Studies class. Some of these participants mentioned that their interest in women's studies is why they decided to participate in the study.

I also emailed various student organizations oriented around service, LGBT issues, and activism. I solicited these groups to tap into known networks of gay men on campus. This may have generated a pool of participants who were politically liberal, active in gay rights, and openly involved in activism. I also emailed individuals whom I believed would know people that would be a good fit for my study. As a result, word of mouth also brought some participants to this present study. This occurred when my original email was forwarded to others. Three participants mentioned that their gay male friend encouraged them to participate by forwarding them the email. Participants who were graduate students or students from universities outside of Michigan reported that word of mouth brought them to the study.

Twenty-eight prospective participants inquired about the study, all over email. Of these twenty-eight prospective participants, only two did not qualify for the study and six were unable to make time for an interview. Due to the overwhelmingly response of participants, flyers and other recruitment methods (i.e. oral script, snowball sampling) were not used. It is possible these other methods could have recruited younger participants, participants not in the liberal arts, and

participants not connected to feminism, activism, and service; therefore not reaching out to these groups limited my sample.

Sample Descriptions

All participants identified as straight/heterosexual women. The majority of participants were currently undergraduate students at the University of Michigan, one participant was an undergraduate senior at Harvard University and one participant was an undergraduate junior at the University of North Carolina. One participant attended Cornell University as an undergraduate and is now at the University of Michigan for graduate school. Two were recent graduates working full time, one an alumna from the University of Michigan and the other an alumna from a smaller liberal arts university. All participants were between 19 and 24 years old, the average participant was 21 years old (See Table 1 for details). The majority of participants identified as white (65%); four participants (20%) identified as African American or black and three participants (15%) identified as Asian American. Even though students of color make up only 26.1% of the population at the University of Michigan (where most participants attended) my sample has 35% women of color (University of Michigan Student Affairs, 2011). This racial diversity allows for a greater representation of straight cultures and helps draw themes surrounding the influence of racial identity on understanding of straight identity, allyhood and friendship dynamics.

Table 1: Description of Sample n=20

	n	%
Year in School		
Sophomore	2	10%
Junior	4	20%
Senior	11	55%
Recent Graduate	2	10%
Current Graduate	1	5%

Racial Identity

White	13	65%
African American	4	20%
Asian American	3	15%

Age

19	1	5%
20	3	15%
21	8	40%
22	5	25%
23	1	5%
24	2	10%

Every participant had at least one close gay male friend. All participants focused on only one friend for the majority of the interview. Six participants talked about another gay male friend in addition to their first friend. Seventeen participants had friends who were of the same racial identity as they were, and three participants had friends who were of a different racial identity.

Table 2: Participants and their friendship pair

Participant name	Racial Identity	Friend's Name	Friend's Racial Identity	Second Friend's Name	Second Friend's Racial Identity
Jade	Asian American	Martin	White	n/a	n/a
Elizabeth	White	Eric	White	n/a	n/a
Alexis	White	Liam	White	n/a	n/a
Erica	White	Brian	White	n/a	n/a
Margaret	Asian American	Zack	White	Mark	Asian American
Monica	African American	Cody	Black	Aaron	White
Nicole	White	James	White	n/a	n/a
Violet	White	Spencer	White	n/a	n/a
Destiny	African American	Tyler	White	n/a	n/a
Sydney	White	Dan	White	n/a	n/a
Skye	African American	Ethan	Black	Leroy	Black
Anna	White	Nate	White	n/a	n/a
Stephanie	White	Scott	White	n/a	n/a
Adrienne	African American	Marcus	Latino	n/a	n/a
Michelle	White	Brady	White	n/a	n/a
Jessica	White	Chris	White	n/a	n/a
Aida	Asian American	Brent	White	n/a	n/a
Megan	White	Ray	White	n/a	n/a
Leeya	White	Seth	White	Shane	Black

Maggie

White

Robbie

White

Will

White

Interview Procedure

All interviews, except for two, were conducted in a private room in the Women's Studies building at the University of Michigan. The other two interviews were conducted over Skype: one with a participant from Harvard University and one with a participant University of North Carolina. Participants were emailed the consent form (see Appendix A) to look over once an interview time was arranged. At the time of the interview participants were asked to look over the consent form one more time and then sign it if they wished to continue.

The interview protocol (see Appendix B) was semi-structured with four sets of primary questions asked of every participant. The first section focused on the participant's reflection on her identities, centering on gender and sexual orientation. The next section focused on the participant and her relationship with her gay male friend. This section asked participants to compare this friendship to other friendships and to consider why they felt gay men and straight women are friends with one another; these questions were loosely adopted from a previous study on GMSW friendships (Grigoriou, 2004). The third section focused on learning as a result of the friendship. The final section probed participants to think about allyhood.

Although the same main questions were asked of every participant the order varied between interviews. I incorporated main questions as they naturally came up in participant's responses, allowing for more fluid conversation. Probing questions were used to clarify perspectives and enhance the narratives given by participants.

I mimicked the language of my participants in an effort to allow my participants to construct their stories in their own words. For example, although I commonly used straight to describe participants, one participant Megan, vehemently believed in using heterosexual. In the

interview she said,

“Also, I have been trying to say heterosexual rather than straight I know that some people are, well it's a common term, and I know people use it, but some people find it triggering because if you are straight, am I just really weird. It's just you know language with that. Yeah it's good.. I don't know.”

After she stated this, I used the term heterosexual in the remainder of the interview.

I also would adjust my academic terminology based on participant's vocabulary. I would only use academic terminology after a participant used it. For example, in responding to a question about her friendship, Violet talked about performing femininity and only then did I ask her about gender performance in my probing questions. I may have brought about deeper reflection, especially around understanding of privilege and oppression, in participants who could be probed with academic terminology as a result of this interview style.

A short set of follow-up questions was sent to every participant approximately two months after the interview to clarify some demographic information about the participant (age, major in school), the racial identities of their gay male friends, further thoughts on allyhood, and what they thought of the interview process. Ninety-five percent of participants responded to the follow-up questions. The demographic information was used to complete demographic information about each participant. The supplemental responses about allyhood were coded and analyzed the same way the interview transcripts were used. Finally, the responses around the interview process were not used as a part of the present study except to help reflect on my interview style and skills.

Data Analysis

I transcribed all interviews verbatim. This process allowed me to become very acquainted with each participant and my data set holistically. Pseudonyms were given to any person mentioned in the interview. As I transcribed I kept a journal of vivid quotes that struck me as

hitting on my main research questions. These initial notes jumpstarted the initial coding of the dataset.

I used a process of open coding and axial coding based in grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to identify themes in the narratives of straight college women and their relationships with gay men. During open coding I read all transcripts and made note of reoccurring phrases and themes within and across participants. I consciously worked to be open to themes that were not anticipated from my understanding of previous literature and original research questions. In Vivo, or verbatim coding, was used during the open coding to preserve participants understanding of their life experiences (Charmaz, 2006). After gathering all potential themes, codes were merged together, and modified. This axial coding process developed more salient categories (Charmaz, 2006). This methodology is appropriate for this study given that I wanted to illuminate the participant's own meaning of their identities and experiences with respect to their gender and sexuality.

Throughout my coding process I kept a codebook to ensure that the definition of a code did not drift thus increasing the validity of these finding. Each memo in the codebook included a description of the code, quotes from the interviews that serve as clear examples, and how the code links with other major themes.

To maintain confidentiality, the transcripts for the interviews and all coding materials remained on a password-protected computer that only I had access to. Upon the completion of the project, all transcripts and coding materials were destroyed.

Chapter 1: Heterosexual Authorship: Constructing Our Identity as Straight Women

In this chapter I will combine ideas of heterosexual consciousness with self-authorship theory to develop a fuller concept, which I call *heterosexual authorship*. Analyzing experiences with heterosexual authorship can reveal more nuanced understandings of privilege than using self-authorship or heterosexual consciousness alone. Self-authorship as an identity development process examines how individuals consider and reshape external messages to make meaning for themselves. When coupled with heterosexual consciousness this conceptualization centers on messages surrounding sexual orientation and gender allowing for a more in-depth understanding of three elements (1) *how participants reject or conform to heterosexist messages*, (2) *understand their privilege as straight women* (3) *understand themselves in the larger context of heterosexism*. The intersection of other identities remains important but the centering of heterosexuality allows for an in-depth examination of straight privilege. Heterosexual authorship attempts to explain not only how aware participants are aware of their straight privilege but also how actively they resist or conform to heterosexist messages to shape this identity to be anti-heterosexist. This examination may contribute an understanding of not just the consequence of straight privilege but how privilege is sustained.

In this chapter I will show how participants had resistant, developing, and compliant heterosexual authorship. Participants are categorized into these three different benchmarks of heterosexual authorship by the different strategies they use to make meaning of heterosexist messages and their straight privilege. This is not to say participants belong to static categories, but to highlight differences in how straight women reinforce or deconstruct heterosexist messages.

It is especially compelling to understanding how straight women construct their heterosexual identity because of the intersection of the oppression they face from male gender privilege may contribute to a more complicated sense of heterosexual privilege. In this chapter I will demonstrate how this meaning-making process either confines them or frees them to act outside of hegemonic performances of feminine heterosexuality. Their understanding of their straight identity also may influence how they relate to their gay male friend who experiences oppression as a result of heterosexual privilege.

Compliant Heterosexual Authorship

The mindset of compliant heterosexual authorship is driven by a lack of internal basis for any critical stance on socialized views. Few participants with this authorship articulated an awareness of straight privilege. Often participants generalized knowledge about straight women to all people in the same social identity, this was seen when participants described, " *how one knows*" they are a straight woman instead of "*how I know*". External messages from friends, parents, partners were very influential in how these participants described their identity as straight women. The piece of clay being molded by external authorities instead of one's own hands personifies how these participants passively accepted heterosexist messages (Mezaros, 2007, p.11). Six of the twenty participants had compliant heterosexual authorship. In this section I will show how this conceptualization risks reinforcing and limiting categories of gender and sexual orientations categories.

A common example of compliant heterosexual authorship arose when participants defined being a straight woman as merely an attraction to men. Being straight was so normalized it was not even addressed as an identity but rather a natural state of being. Jade was so thrown off when asked to talk about her identity as a straight woman that she laughed, "This is too deep

(laughter) I don't know... I've never thought about that". She continued later to say she would never describe herself as a straight woman.

I honestly don't think about it, like I don't label myself, when I see myself I don't, it's not the first thing I see "I'm a straight woman" so it's hard to, I feel like, there's nothing, it doesn't go through my head ever.

Jade's reluctance to taking on the identity of straight woman, even though she is both straight and a woman, shows she does not actively reflect about this identity, or even thinks of being a straight woman as something to call her own.

Similar to Jade, Erica, also talked about how for most of her life she never thought about being straight as something to identify as:

It was never in my mind "Oh I'm straight". It was just, well, I find boys attractive... I went to an all girls high school, so like boy craziness happened sometimes or just things like that, but for me it was always kind of my parents are still married, my brother just got married, and like you know what I mean, I kind of want the same path that they had and a big part of that is being straight. I can't picture it any other way.

Erica uncritically accepts straightness as the only option for her, rather than questioning why she thinks being straight is the only means to have a marriage like her parents or her brother. Erica does not name straight as why she has unearned privilege in her life (e.g. knowing she will have to option to get married) and instead frames it as an attraction and a path to follow. When straight people do not claim to have a straight identity it reinforces their straightness as essential and normalized. Failure to identify as straight makes it easier to ignore that privilege is tied to membership to this identity.

Similar to Jade and Erica, Leeya's compliant heterosexual authorship was also based in not thinking about her straight identity.

I definitely don't really hmm... I'm very comfortable with who I am and I don't really think about my sexuality much, it's just there and not really changing for me at least. I mean obviously, just checking in, I'm straight right. Like I don't know, I've never kissed a girl.

Even though Leeya remarks that she is comfortable with herself, this comfort is not the result of the deep reflection that is characteristic of resistant heterosexual authorship. It is likely that Leeya is so comfortable because of the privilege that comes with being straight and not having to examine her sexual orientation. Her remark that she “checks in” to be sure she is straight carries a nonchalant tone that does not have the full weight of what it would actually mean to come to a different conclusion. This lack of reflection trivializes the experience of those who are questioning.

Leeya went on to say that the experiences she may face as a woman are not anything she will have control over. The gendered expectations she is talking about take place within heterosexist constructs (women needing to take on family care and straight college hook-up culture).

And as far as for me, the difficulties I foresee, I want to go to med school and I also want to have a family and do all that stuff. So for me, my conflict will be 5, 10 years down the road. It's like a career/family divide and that's one of those things that I think about the most... It hasn't been a problem for me so far. And college, Greek life and going to bars and all that shit, you just have to give up on any sort of men (laughter). You can't have high expectations.

Leeya passively accepts rather than questions the problems she will face in the work force and currently in Greek life hookup culture. Leeya frames how she will experience life based on how the world is set up rather than the actions she can take for herself. This is not to say that Leeya is not up against forms of discrimination and systems that can hold her down, but it is to point out that she has views discrimination as something to expect rather than something to react to and even resist.

Developing Heterosexual Authorship

In defining themselves as straight women, many participants articulated privileges that come with being straight but also demonstrated heterosexist beliefs through the ways they demeaned and dismissed LGBTQ identities. This simultaneous recognition and dismissal demonstrates a heterosexual authorship that was at times resistant but often compliant. The spectrum of understanding their straight privilege appears complicated from heterosexist sentiments within seemingly supportive statements. This tension demonstrates that participants had some anti-heterosexist values guiding their understanding of heterosexual identity but were not consistent in their ability to apply that understanding to their sense of self. Additionally, there was a lot of tension between developing own terms to understand their identity as straight women self and having heterosexist messages influence their views. Participants with developing heterosexual authorship did not passively accept heterosexist messages as much as participants with compliant heterosexual authorship, but they also did not challenge these messages as much as those with resistant heterosexual authorship. Half of the participants (10 out of 20) showed developing heterosexual authorship. In this section I will demonstrate the tension participants face as they strive to resist heterosexism with their heterosexual identity.

Megan characterized being a straight woman as being “the norm”. She talked about many privileges she has in society as a result of being straight but also talked about certain characteristics that straight women are expected to hold. Megan felt frustration over the expectations around dress, weight, and interests that come with being a straight woman. For example, her love of video games is at odds with her identity as a straight woman. Gaming is something that she is not expected to enjoy or be good at. However, when asked if she felt being a tomboy fit with being a straight woman, she replied that it didn’t really matter:

My identity is very much impacted by the fact that I have a boyfriend right now so I don't feel like I need to be someone else. Or I don't feel the pressure of having to fit into a

certain mold. Because I feel like when people are trying to fit into society's molds. It has to do with fulfilling that so people can accept you and maybe even have someone to date in the future. So having someone that I know, that's in my life all the time, that's going to support me if I'm a tomboy or a girly-girl. He likes me either way. I think that helps me a lot.

Megan's construction of her identity is an example of developing heterosexual authorship because men have a large role deciding how she feels about herself with regard to sexist expectations of women within heterosexism. Megan relies on an external source, her boyfriend, to guide her security as a straight woman, rather than her own anti-heterosexist values. Women are often socialized to believe their identity is an outward performance for other people. Thus, it would make sense that Megan would stick to gendered norms in order to please straight men who she might want to date. This pressure is lifted, however, when she is in a relationship because she is reassured that she is valued for herself. Megan being critical of characteristics imposed on straight women demonstrates she has some anti-heterosexist internal belief system. However, if Megan had a resistant heterosexual authorship, the pressure to conform to the societal norms around being a straight woman would not shift based on her relationship status.

Maggie also was able to identify problematic norms imposed on women in society but felt she needed to actively conform to them to identify as a straight woman. For example, Maggie believed that part of being a straight woman is being someone who straight guys will find attractive:

I have medium length hair. It drives me crazy and I think if I were a lesbian I would cut it short because then people might think I was a lesbian by seeing me but it wouldn't matter because I actually would be one. And my partners that I would look for wouldn't mind that I have sort hair, well some of them might not like it. But it wouldn't be as big of an issue as with straight men who probably wouldn't like that.

To Maggie, because lesbians are already living a "non-traditional life" they are more open to dressing differently, tattoos, and short hair. She goes on to talk about how women tend to look at

the “inside” more than men, making it easier to have a partner who is less concerned with outward appearance (i.e. short hair), eluding that lesbians have more ownership over their gender performance than straight women. This demonstrates how Maggie’s underlying assumptions and generalizations about how lesbians navigate oppression, feel and act in relationships, and perform their gender. Instead of challenging heterosexist messages about what it means to look like a lesbian, Maggie conforms and keeps her hair long. Her assertion that lesbians are freer in their self-expression completely contradicts an earlier statement in the interview when she said straight women receive no penalty for dressing down in a stereotypical lesbian style.

Straight women have a lot more freedom to dress as a lesbian and if they are straight it's okay, because it's just oh she's just being casual... Yeah no, it's me being, oh comfy pajama day. It's not like oh wow, why can't you dress like a real woman? It's not a big deal for me.

These two statements demonstrate a nuanced understanding of her place as a straight woman. Maggie sees a fine line between having the ability to occasionally dress frumpy without moral subjection, and the pressure to dress very feminine to signal she is straight. For Maggie a part of her self-definition is having others be able to label her as straight, requiring her to adhere to the norms of looking like a “real woman”. This demonstrates how Maggie simultaneously understands she has privilege as a straight woman but still reacts to heterosexist messages by conforming to a norm.

Destiny was also aware of systems at play that grant her privilege. Destiny articulated that she was socialized to be straight, in addition to realizing she is the “norm”.

I guess until college, for the most part, any women that I came in contact with I identified or read as straight women. So mostly from my surroundings, how everyone behaved, and performed their gender was similar to mine. So growing up and being socialized, that is how I came to identify, the same way the people around me identified.

Destiny's understanding that she was born into a world where being straight was normal and taught to her demonstrates an understanding of cultural oppression that she benefits from.

Destiny went on to talk about how it's easy to check out and not think about her sexuality because she fits into what is expected. Her desire to remain cognizant of her privilege as a straight woman is a testament to her commitment to learn more about her identity.

I noticed lately that I just kind of have to check that privilege just because it is so easy for me to have a box that I fit into and not have people look at me and question that or think I'm not the norm. It's kind of easy to go about my everyday life and not think about my gender or sexuality but for other people that is a constant, worry and reminder and just being aware of that, I've noticed recently is really important.

Destiny acknowledged that she doesn't have to think about her straightness shows tension in wanting to be more aware but also falling back into a place where she doesn't think about her own identity. This shows how Destiny is developing heterosexual authorship because she is cognizant of her straight privilege but does not consistently apply this consciousness in her day-to-day life. Furthermore, she does not remark on the straight culture she is a part of and instead only focuses on the gay/queer oppression she does not face. Those with resistant heterosexual authorship see their heterosexuality as a site to learn about their identity instead of constantly comparing themselves to those who are not straight.

Michelle talked about how people generally assume everyone they meet is straight. She emphasized that it would be difficult to not fit into this.

Your sexuality is part of who you are and what it means to be a person. It's complicated to be something different than what people expect you to be. When do you explain that? When do you tell them?... So I think it's (straight is) just the default setting of not having to tell people

Even though Michelle has never had the experience of coming out, she is able to articulate how coming out isn't a single event but rather a perpetual state of explanation to people who expect you to be the default. Considering all sexuality is to some degree closeted, the construct of

coming out as only a thing non-heterosexuals need to do reflects and reinforces heterosexism (Butler, 1993). As Butler articulated, the notion of coming out places heterosexuality as the origin with all other sexualities framed in contrast (Butler, 1993). The constant need to label is often imposed by straight people and remains the responsibility for those who are not considered the “norm”. Michelle’s comment on how she does not need to come out it shows how an anti-heterosexist belief system guides her understanding of her straight identity.

Michelle continued to elaborate on how identity membership can grant certain access in your life, describing how sexuality has an impact on what you “want in life and what you can have in life.” It seemed from context that Michelle meant romantic partners as what you want in life and the ability to be with them openly as what you can have in life. Here Michelle connects again how being a straight woman is not only a personal identity but also a social identity that will allow her to have certain things in society, like marriage, that is denied to others. Michelle does not add any reinterpretation of what this means in her own life even though she articulates it well. Michelle relied on framing straightness as a norm that fits her, instead of explaining straightness in her own terms and as its own culture.

Similar to Michelle, Elizabeth also had a nuanced understanding of her straight privilege but did not report ways heterosexism impacts her own life. Specifically she commented on the constant assumption of being straight was something she took for granted:

You know I think what’s easiest about it. It just like there is a like the norm and there isn’t an assumption I’d be anything else. It’s not something that you be like “oh I wonder if she’s gay or straight?” It’s just kind of like people have an assumption. I think especially for girls. I mean I don’t know but I know there is a lot more...like a...almost like a, they think they can tell if a guy is gay or not. But I think that people don’t even think about that for girls.

Elizabeth notices how many people usually think they can tell when a guy is gay but don’t think about it for girls. The de-sexing of lesbian gender performance further reinforces how all women,

especially lesbians, are forced to live within male dominated identification. Elizabeth's statement shows how she understands the lesbian existence is often rendered invisible. She went on to talk about how she gets privilege from this heterosexist notion.

So if someone asks me out they wouldn't be like, "I wonder if she's in to guys, will she like me". I don't think that's something I have to worry about as much

Elizabeth not only named day-to-day privileges of being straight, but understood how her she benefits from an assumption that minimizes lesbian identity as insignificant. Elizabeth clearly is aware of many heterosexist messages that impact her own straight identity but she does not talk about how heterosexism impacts her except to say she does not have to think about it much. Despite her awareness, Elizabeth also did not demonstrate clear resistance to these messages. She was about to see how being straight is something people assume that automatically fits her but she did not articulate if and how she challenges these messages.

Resistant Heterosexual Authorship

Participants with resistant heterosexual authorship had a strong anti-heterosexist internal belief system guiding how they understood messages about being a straight woman, including how they viewed their own identities and the ways they interact with others around heterosexism. Participants commented on messages they have heard about what it means to be a straight woman but those with resistant heterosexual authorship reinterpreted those messages to make sense of them for themselves, often rejecting external messages. Participants with resistant heterosexual authorship had an anti-heterosexist value system to guide how they acted and interpreted experiences. Anti-heterosexist values demonstrate a reinterpretation of socialization around being straight. Within heterosexual authorship, to be guided by heterosexist beliefs is to not fully have developed a resistant authorship around this identity.

Only three of the twenty participants in the study had resistant heterosexual authorship. Of these four women, two were women of color, one African American and the other Indian-American. In addition to having a strong sense of their heterosexuality, these women actively integrated their racial identity into how they understood their heterosexuality. Alexis, the other participant with resistant heterosexual authorship, did not intertwine her race into how she understood her straightness but was one of the few white women to comment on her white racial identity at all at any point in the study. This supports previous research on self-authorship, which found coordination of multiple identities as a part of an active construction of self (internal self-authorship) (Baxter Magdola et al., 2008). In this section I hope to reveal the complex ways Aida, Adrienne, Elizabeth and Alexis demonstrated resistant heterosexual authorship.

When asked about being a straight woman, Aida articulated that there is an expectation of what that means, but it is not necessarily how you have to act.

I think like again, back to media stuff, there are certain images of a straight women, she likes to shop, the way she dresses. I think those certain things are perpetuated in our society, like again, mainstream so the day-to-day thing it's easier for me to fit that mold than a homosexual woman. But at the same time, the question is, do I want to fit that mold? So I guess that is something that is difficult for heterosexual women, just because you are heterosexual doesn't mean you want to conform to fit that mold.

When Aida questioned whether one wants to fit the mold or not she demonstrated her belief in choice surrounding how she shapes herself rather than just having to conform to the media. Aida demonstrated that normative expectations is limiting for everyone but understands that straight women resisting expectations varies from the ways a lesbian woman resists, showing an understanding of differences based on power and privilege.

She went on to talk about how her identity as straight does not limit how she builds relationships with non-straight individuals.

So for me, a part of who I am, it defines a lot of things that I find interesting and fun but it doesn't define... For me it's not a narrowing identity, it puts me in certain categories but it doesn't close me off from others

Aida realized that her straight identity influences who she is as well as how she is perceived in relationships but she does not want it to prevent her from building relationships across sexual orientation. This demonstrates resistant heterosexual authorship because Aida is pushing back on the notion that straight people would not be open to connecting with LGBTQ people.

Aida then addressed how the docile, quiet, religious, Indian woman who wants to get married does not fit whom she is but is imposed on her in the context of her race.

Also, not just being a heterosexual woman but being an Indian, there are a lot of cultural stereotypes that come with being a woman that I definitely don't fit. Right, so Indian women are expected to have certain interests and be treated a certain way, talk a certain way and study certain things and only have certain interests and those are not things that I culturally identify with at all.

Aida's articulation of what is expected of her in contrast to her understanding of herself demonstrates resistant heterosexual authorship. Although this is more explicitly surrounding gender, it includes an expectation that to be a woman is to be a straight woman. Even though her parents are very supportive of her, she still feels at odds with parts of her culture.

I haven't been to church in five years and it literally started with me being like I don't want to go, I don't like anyone there, and then I stopped going. So that's an identity that I have and I think I have kind of defined in my own way but I definitely don't think I relate to on a broader scale.

Aida struggles with the conservative values of her church, placing her in a position where she sometimes feels isolated in her Indian community. In spite of the fact that this tension has been hard, it has helped her define herself as a straight Indian woman in her own terms, where she can relate to some aspects of her culture but not others (like the church). This coordination of multiple identities exemplifies how resistant heterosexual authorship considers many nuanced messages around heterosexual identity.

Similar to Aida, Adrienne's race changes the way she feels as a straight woman and has helped her understand her heterosexual identity in her own way rather than based on other's approval or expectations. Adrienne immediately clarified that she thought of herself more as a black woman when asked about being a straight woman:

I never think of myself as a woman, I always think of myself as a black woman. So I can't address that question, but I can address how I've seen my gender intertwined with my race. Now that idea has become ever evolving, because I see myself as a black person or a first generation. But thinking of myself as a woman is somewhat absent and unconscious, it's only when I see myself where I'm going to be when I graduate in terms of employment, job placement, and how I want to maintain my relationship with my boyfriend and when or if and at what time do I want to have a family and start popping out babies. That's the only time I think about it.

Although Adrienne insisted that she doesn't think about her gender, it seemed clear that she meant she rarely thinks of her gender as a stand-alone identity unless she is thinking about gender discrimination at work or having babies. Rather than explaining her identities in silos, Adrienne wanted to talk about how her experience as a straight woman takes place within the construct of her race. Her immediate pushback on the initial framing of the question demonstrates a critique of the historical framing that to be a woman is to be a white woman. Adrienne's self-reflection around her multiple identities appears to guide an understanding of her self that resists preconceived notions of what it means to be a straight woman. She went on to talk about how she is responsible for developing awareness around her straightness:

To be accountable for my own actions and to be conscious of them in a way that is impactful, mostly positive. Just always remembering the complexity of the human experience, that becomes uniquely defined, when you identify that is marginalized to the world

Adrienne articulates how even though identity is constantly defined when you are marginalized based on your identity, it is important to remember that people are complex. This dedication to

learning about herself and building an understanding of the ways others are marginalized helps her put her anti-heterosexist belief system in action:

Let me put it this way, making people feel safe who generally feel unsafe. Which also means the people who always feel safe may feel unsafe around you, because you radicalize. And that's a consequence.

Adrienne follows her internal belief system while interacting with people who may say homophobic things. Instead of ignoring homophobic remarks, Adrienne pushes back.

When someone says, "I don't know any gay people" and I would, "how do you know that? "Because I just know" "Well how do you know that? Has anyone told you that.. well I wonder why? Do you make it comfortable for people to tell you why? Because you just said this about gay people so how could people be comfortable." So just probing people and getting them to think differently. With an older person, 65 and up crowd, it's just you know what, I'm not only debating what they say but their culture and generational values. Especially if you want to change the way people think about, you need to show respect.

Adrienne's description of questioning a peer about whether or not they know any gay people shows how Adrienne understands that this is a form of resistance that might not be well received by everyone but it is important for her to stay true to herself and her beliefs. She wants to help others question their heteronormative thinking but also wants to meet people where they are at. For Adrienne, challenging older people is a balance of being critical of heterosexist statements but also considering why they believe what they believe. Adrienne goes above self-education that is characteristic in resistant heterosexual authorship and also helps others develop critical consciousness.

Alexis also talked about developing consciousness in her journey to resistant heterosexual authorship where she started to define herself less and less by her peers. Recalling her high school years, Alexis talked about how to be a straight woman was just being attracted to men and being sexy:

I was really a tomboy growing up and as I got into college and I was wearing flannel and

sweatpants and t-shirts. I really got this message, that if I was going to wear that stuff I was really going to be seen as not an attractive straight woman or gay, like a lesbian. I'm not friends with the people who told me that anymore because that was pretty judgmental but I just felt a lot of pressure to dress like a straight woman would dress.

Alexis talked about being comfortable with her identity as a straight woman and going with how she wanted to dress, leaving behind messages she had heard in high school. A main component of resistant heterosexual authorship involves the shedding of previous messages based in self-love and understanding. It is important to note that Alexis being assumed to be a lesbian in high school was a catalyst for her to start reconsidering ideas about sexual orientation. Her experience of isolation due to her peers heterosexist beliefs led her to reflect and define herself in her own terms, not theirs. Alexis continued to say that for her a part of being straight is being an ally. She was the only participant to tie allyhood unprompted into her identity as a straight woman.

Allyhood is an integral part of who Alexis is and how she wants to live her life:

Yeah knowing that just because I'm straight, I can't really be part of that community. It doesn't mean I have to be separated. I can be a friend, be an ally and also be an activist.

She strives to build authentic relationships where she is not inserting herself into the community but actively working with others. This places her anti-heterosexist beliefs into how she knows herself and interacts with the world. Although participants with resistant heterosexual authorship may not be perfect, there is always the possibility they may say or do things that are heterosexist at times; their level of consciousness guiding their actions and active reflection and interpretation of themselves sets them apart from participants with a developing sense of heterosexual authorship and compliant heterosexual authorship.

In defining ourselves without critique of the messages we have been given about what it means to be a straight woman, we confine ourselves to a compulsory heterosexuality and external messages about what it means to be a straight woman. Moving away from passive

acceptance of these heterosexist and sexist messages allows us to react in ways that can raise consciousness about straight privilege, and may open space for resistance to these messages.

Self-definition is empowering because it takes back our self-construction from what others think of us to what we think for ourselves. Only then will our performance of sexuality and gender be based in values that will not perpetuate heterosexism and instead create space for us to experience a heterosexuality that is not compulsory.

Chapter 2: Motivation for LGBTQ Allyhood

Participants' friendships with gay men are filled with companionship, compassion, and love. Participants throughout the study articulated how they care deeply about their friend and want to support him in the best way they know how. Considering most participants were aware of their heterosexual privilege to some degree, exploring the ways in which participants describe supporting their friend around his sexual orientation can reveal ways GMSW friendships can be spaces for developing allyhood.

Even though many participants had an interest in feminism and/or activism, they did not form friendships with their gay friend in order to be allies. Most participants became friends with their gay friend through growing up together, being in a similar organization, or having a similar interest. For example, Alexis described that she was friends with Liam for all the usual reasons, "We just sort of relax together, watch TV, and like eat burritos. We are just really relaxed and casual but at the same time we know important things about each other." An alliance through allyhood was not on Alexis' radar as a reason for her friendship with Liam (even though she later addressed allyhood as being very important to her and their friendship). The consciousness around social identity and ability to situate friendship in larger systems of privilege and oppression goes above the call of what many participants anticipated when entering these friendships, as well as how many of their other personal friendships function.

Nonetheless, the difference in social group membership situates these interpersonal relationships within larger structures of inequality and difference, even if friends do not think about allyhood when forming these friendships. Similar to how Worthington et al. (2002) describes heterosexual identity as a personal identity and a social identity, GMSW friendships have an aspect that is personal (e.g. the day-to-day hanging out) but also within a larger social

construct (e.g. support a friend who is oppressed based on their sexual orientation). In this chapter I will specifically look at the ways these friendships are occurring in a larger socio-political landscape.

All participants in this sample ($n=20$) articulated some desire to be an ally to their gay friend. This finding alone demonstrates how GMSW friendships in the millennial generation are spaces where straight women think of their friendship, to some degree, as taking part in a larger social construct. Therefore distinctions I make in the chapter surrounding allyhood are not to distinguish who is a better friend but rather to comment on motivations for allyhood within the context of social justice and liberation from systems of oppression. Through this chapter, I will show how participant's motivation to be allies can impact the effectiveness, consistency, outcome, and sustainability of any social change efforts.

I will apply Edwards' concept of allyhood to understand the motivation of participants to support their gay friend and any larger social justice outcomes (Edwards, 2006). In addition to the three categories Edward distinguishes (ally for friend, ally for others and ally for social justice) I will add two more categories: aspiring ally for others (between ally for friend and ally for others), as well as aspiring ally for social justice (between ally for others and ally for social justice), in order to show a wider spectrum of thought processes and growth. Adding gradations better illustrates allyhood as continual process that individuals are constantly shifting in. These motivations are presented distinctly for clarity purposes but they may be experienced much more fluidly in real life. Allyhood is one-way participants' understanding of broader issues of equality and their place in social change is reflected. Throughout this chapter I will demonstrate the more invested straight women see themselves in allyhood, the more effective they can be in bringing about change.

Ally for Friend

Participants who wished to be an ally for friend had an individualistic concept of social justice. These participants were conscious that their friend's gay identity was often tied to discrimination and hoped to be supportive in whatever way possible. Participants often talked about how they would listen to what their friend would need and then act. A few indicated thoughts about challenging other individuals but all talked about how they usually don't engage as allies with people other than their friend. These participants saw their friend's fight for justice as a solitary issue to support rather than being critical of larger structures of inequality. This conceptualization was the second most common of all the categories (after aspiring ally for social justice), applied to six of the twenty participants. Allyhood orientated on an individual basis raises concerns because it demonstrates that many of the straight women in these friendship pairs do not identify larger structures of injustice as the problem or see how they are connected to these systems. Based on Edwards' conceptualization, this type of allyhood is less effective, consistent, and sustainable in bringing about larger structural equity.

Anna felt she could be supportive of her friend Nate as an ally even if she was not supportive of him being gay.

If I weren't so open to the fact that he's gay, I hope I could be supportive and just you know understand that it was something he was needing or comfortable saying. And I could put my own feelings about it on hold and just be there for him

Even though Anna's beliefs are supportive of gay rights, she does not believe other straight people need to be anti-homophobic to be allies. If someone is only an ally to an individual friend this could mean they are free to disengage around others, or even actively perpetuate injustice. This conceptualization places an ally's sphere of influence to just their friend, raising questions of consistency. According to Edwards (2006) inconsistent allies would be able to support

individual friends but are less effective allies because they do not have larger investment in dismantling oppression.

Skye also articulated that she does not feel connected to the larger cause as an ally.

I think for me it's mostly been listening because most of my friends are not very active, in terms of typical activism like marching and stuff, so I think it just depends on what they want to do. I think I am more of a personal ally to them rather than to the greater cause. So it's more of what they want to do and I will support them in doing that.

Skye saying she is not an ally to “the greater cause” indicates she may be unlikely to confront overt acts of oppression when her friend is not around. Although it is respectful that Skye looks for direction from her friend, this constant supervision of action from those who are oppressed may not be as sustainable. According to Edwards (2006) and Broido (2000) allies who are consistently accountable to all members of an oppressed group are more effective in creating social change.

Like Skye, Leeya also used the term “personal ally” to describe herself and how she is invested in her friend. “I would say (an ally) is anyone who will have your back and you have to have theirs. You would do anything for them.” However, this give and receive is not like the participants who seek partnership with their friends, because Leeya rarely wants to engage in issues surrounding broader gay rights, especially when her friends are not around.

People say, “that's so gay” all the time and I guess I should correct people but I don't really feel the responsibility to. Will people really care? It's kind of the thing you personally have to want to do. I don't think I have said, “that's so gay” much in my life, even if I would I would feel bad and be conscious about it. It's hard to correct someone and know if it will effect change in them.

Leeya does not feel challenging others about use of homophobic microaggressions is worthwhile. Her friends and family perpetuating the narrative of “that’s so gay” does not seem to hurt her.

Leeya’s choice to not develop consciousness in those around her demonstrates how she does not see underlying connection and harm behind these statements that further perpetuate

heterosexism, which hurts her and her friend (Brod, 1987). An ally who does not challenge those around them is not as effective in resisting larger narratives that perpetuate oppression.

Aspiring Ally for Others

Participants who are aspiring allies for others are distinguished by beliefs that were geared toward creating change outside just their friend but the means in which they challenged others was inconsistent and only on an individual level. Participants saw themselves as having a greater responsibility to create change than the participants who were allies for friends. This deeper integration of themselves in the issues can be characterized by a self-interest that is for “me and you” (Goodman, 2000). It is important to highlight this as a distinct category, because it shows how people’s views around allyhood can straddle the line between individuals of a certain identity and identity groups. Only one participant, Sydney, was an aspiring ally for others.

So I guess just like being educated about the perspectives and knowing how people who have stigmatized identities feel about it and being as first hand about it as possible. (...) Through my friendships of people who are gay I have been exposed to certain events or information or perspectives. That I haven't actively sought out but how my life is I have been exposed to. So being an ally is being educated and aware and being supportive when it's asked of you.

Sydney does not see how being straight is a first-hand experience within social injustice that she can reflect and learn from in stating that she needs to learn about the perspectives of people who have stigmatized identities. This isn't to say she should not actively engage with her friends who are gay. Instead it is being critical of the way Sydney does not see her privilege as a means to learn about inequality. Sydney is constantly receiving information and perspectives about being straight, not just when her gay friends expose her to things about their gay identity. This type of allyhood raises questions of sustainability because Sydney is relying on those who are oppressed to teach her and guide her through the process of being an ally.

Ally for Others

Participants who were allies for others commonly claimed their motivation for allyhood in contrast to straight people who were unsupportive. They aimed to be the exception but in the end their allyhood motivation was not as effective because it lacked sustainability. Three of the twenty participants in the study were allies for others.

Nicole continually commented on feeling of pride that she identified as an LGBTQ ally, “I’m one of those people who fully embraces it and loves people of all backgrounds.” Nicole attempts to separate herself from other straight people with her ally efforts by stating she is “one of those people”. This frames people as the problem instead of the structures that perpetuate intolerance and inequity (Edwards, 2006). Nicole’s conceptualization of allyhood may be a less effective because it does not build partnership with other straight people. Nicole continued to talk about her allyhood in the context of taking her gay friend to her sorority formal.

I’ll bring my gay friends to my sorority stuff and not really care what you think and it’s ok by my standards and if you have a problem with it, you know it’s your loss not mine

Nicole does not see the consequence of other people not understanding. Partnership and shared learning among those who hold privilege is effective because it creates opportunities to unlearn homophobic socialization without oppressed individuals (Edwards, 2006). In the case of this event she could have put her friend in danger of harassment or harm if they were in a very homophobic environment. This shows a sense of allyhood where she comes before people around her, including her friend sometimes. As long as she is seen as the supportive straight ally, she feels good about her role in social change.

Nicole goes on to talk about how even though she fits the norm she doesn’t try to “use it to my advantage but use it to the advantage of other people”. Nicole envisions herself as using her privilege to help others, which in turn puts her in a position to have power over others instead of creating a collective partnership. Nicole realizes that as a straight person she may have access

to people and places that LGBTQ people do not but her continual indication of “using” her privilege connotes that it was hers to begin with.

Aida also placed herself as an ally in a position to fight other straight people who don't understand. Aida reflected on her work campaigning for gay marriage with the Obama campaign when describing allyhood. During this experience she reflected that being an ally was more than being straight and not being homophobic.

I don't want to say pro because that's not the right word but I think you need to be more than indifferent to be an ally. An ally is someone who is genuinely invested in like, fixing or the well-being of other people.

In contrast to Anna, Aida feels you need to have your beliefs align as an ally but it is still about being in a position separate from those who are oppressed by sexual orientation. Aida sees the partnership between her and LGBTQ people as, “you and me” instead of “us” (Goodman, 2000). Talking about the well-being of others removes the fact that everyone's humanity is hurt when people are oppressed. Aida does not acknowledge that her well-being is impacted when the well-being of others improves.

Aida places allyhood outside of individual relationships and into a larger construct when she talks about how society needs to be accepting and tolerant.

Accepting as in you see them as normal members of society, which they are. They are not this whole other being that has this separate identity, puts them aside and puts them in a category away from us normal people. That's absurd. Accepting means you view them as everyone else.

Her sentiment carries a tone that ultimately perpetuates power relations in society even though she is seeing a bigger picture. Aida critiques people who think straight is normal but she still pushes for a notion of normalization. To create a just society it will be necessary to not just integrate what is acceptable but also to be critical about who decides what gets to be normal (Duggan, 2004; Warner, 1999). Liberation should not be incorporating LGBTQ people into what

is normal but a mutual relationship to build better structures of gender and sexual orientation (Duggan, 2004; Warner, 1999).

Aspiring Ally for Social Justice

Aspiring allies for social justice would either acknowledge the system but not fully see themselves in the issue or would insert themselves in a way that perpetuates the system by placing the burden of accountability on those who are oppressed. Eight participants were aspiring allies for social justice, making this the most common motivation for allyhood in this study. Even though these participants were not always very effective it is promising that most participants in this study were in a process of understanding larger systems of heterosexism and had intention to actively make large change,

Megan thought of her role as an ally as a bridge between the people with oppressed identities and those who share her privileged background:

So if I'm in the agent group and I'm dealing with someone in the target group, I can say well this is how I've been socialized so this is how people might be dealing with it. So I feel that I'm in the middle between the group I'm allying for and the group I'm coming from. So let's see what else. I just want to be there and help people in any way they need it.

Megan demonstrates an understanding that people from the privileged group (target) have been socialized to have these beliefs instead of putting blame on the entire group of straight people. She is willing to talk about her own socialization as a straight person to show how other straight people may think or “deal with” their straightness. Yet, her sentiment still remains in the context of helping others and frames a divide between us, (straight people, the allies) and them (LGBQ people, those who need allies) (Goodman, 2000). This division is further seen in how Megan does not address her self-interest in liberation. Megan continually talks about a desire to listen as a means to help others, or correct microaggressions so you don't “hurt someone's feelings”. Her

inability to weave herself into her sense of allyhood shows how she is not an ally for social justice because the focus largely remains on others.

Similar to Megan, Elizabeth focused on allyhood as a need to change structures but largely for other people. Elizabeth shared about the time spent campaigning for Obama with her friend Eric and how their shared political views made their relationship stronger. Together they talked about what is wrong with the system and why it needs to change, demonstrating dialogue and partnership in creating change. However, when talking about why she voted for Obama, Elizabeth was quick to claim it was for Eric and her sister who is a lesbian, “You know, I care enough about them, and their situation that I would base my political views on it.” Elizabeth negates how she is part of the situation by characterizing the situation as belonging to them. Although Elizabeth is fighting against the system, she does not see how she is a part of it.

Michelle also acknowledged larger systems but framed her role as an ally through her friend. Michelle told a story about how she once told a man at a party that his homophobic comment hurt her feelings. When asked about this hurt, Michelle gave a response that demonstrated her motivation for allyhood was a mix between being an ally for others and for social justice.

When you say homophobic things even if no one gay is around, you are still perpetuating this idea that it's ok to say these things. I don't know, it sucks, when I have to be around my friend and something that someone has said hurts him and it hurts me because I love him. So even if he's not around and even if no one gay is around it sucks that's acceptable.

Michelle realizes that a homophobic narrative being perpetuated is the problem in addition to hateful comments hurting individuals. At the same time she frames her hurt around her deep care for her friend. This places him at the center of how Michelle thinks about allyhood

demonstrating she does not quite have the broader conceptualization and insertion of self in the process that an ally for social justice holds.

Ally for Social Justice

Only two participants in the sample were allies for social change, Adrienne and Alexis. It is encouraging to hear how rich in passion and depth these two participants describe their allyhood, even though there were only two of them. They demonstrate an understanding that they are harmed by social systems of oppression even though they have privilege in the context of sexual orientation. They also critique of systems rather than straight people or “bad” individuals. They set these beliefs into action by building true partnerships with others and challenging larger narratives.

Adrienne began talking about allyhood with a powerful analogy on how she feels connected to the injustice her friends face.

You are impacted by another person's experience, almost as if it is yours. In a way that when a person who you are supporting, when you hurt, they cry, when they fall, you stumble, kind of thing. So if that person falls, you clearly don't fall to because that person is not you in an actual sense but it's kind of like you feel it too which is why you stumble.

Through this metaphor Adrienne is clear to articulate that she is not her friend and she is not hurt exactly the way that he is with regard to issues of discrimination and oppression but she feels it; it makes her stumble. Adrienne is impacted when others are harmed by injustice showing that allyhood is for “us” rather than for “you and me” (Goodman, 2000). This sense of fighting together is emphasized when she talks about the oppression her friend Marcus faces as a Latino in his conservative religion: “There is this idea of isolation, henceforth why don't we both be allies and struggle and fight for, and be struggle together.” As a black straight women Adrienne does not face the same oppression that her queer Latino friend does but she recognizes how isolating oppression can feel. A shared sense of oppression is a rallying point for Adrienne to

support her friend showing self-interest in fighting for liberation that will free us all (Edwards, 2006).

Alexis also stressed the importance of partnerships in allyhood that requires recognition and mutual understanding of partnership.

I don't know how you can be an ally without someone reflecting your allyness, sort of you have to recognize each other in that you are doing it together. Because I couldn't be an ally unless the gay community was recognizing I was an ally. I couldn't just go out and say "Hey guys, I'm an ally to the gay community" and everybody would just ignore me unless I had a response from the gay community that was sort of "Yes we would like you to be an ally. That would be cool."

Alexis being recognized by the community she is an ally with is a strategic way to remain accountable to the people most affected by oppression (Edwards, 2006). Alexis understands that when working to redefine a system it is important to go about it in a way that does not perpetuate one group saving another. A sense of togetherness emphasizes Alexis' understanding of allyhood.

Adrienne and Alexis both choose to challenge narratives when putting their values about allyhood into action. Throughout Adrienne's interview she talked about a need to plant seeds in people that they could then consider and grow. Remaining silent is not an option when people say things that conflict with her beliefs. Adrienne wants to disrupt narratives by getting the wheels turning around others' internalized beliefs.

Just when people are saying things that are a direct contest with what you believe and people support, that you say something and are not silent about it. That could be passive aggressive behavior and that could be a speech but it does call for action. And it does call for behavior that is opposition. There needs to be interruption of that narrative.

Adrienne feels called to act based on her beliefs, being an ally is not something she can easily put aside. This shows a strong investment in allyhood. She went on to talk about how the means she approaches others is never to "shut others down or see them as the problem", emphasizing

she frames oppression as systematic and reflected in individuals, rather than imposed by “bad” people. Adrienne acknowledges how she comes from these beliefs herself and it would be hypocritical to judge people for their socialized beliefs when she challenges friends and family (Harro, 2000). She aims to work with where people are at in their process of unlearning heterosexist beliefs.

Alexis also wants to help herself and others reflect critically about internalized phobia and hate.

It just sort of gives me a way not to fall into ideas of phobia or hatred for no reason. Like educating myself about those things is just my way of making sure, like fighting against the overwhelming ideas, in a way...I was working on a project for Queer Studies, so to bring education to everyone and let everyone educate themselves about all the little things that make up gender variations, and what is conformity and what is not conformity.

Alexis sees this process as continual by acknowledging how she may fall back into any homophobic ideas, but is consciously working to stop any heterosexist mindset she may have. This effort has potential to disrupt a cycle of oppression (Harro, 2000). Additionally, Alexis’ desire to empower others to take control for their thoughts, rather than have members of an oppressed group completely guide and teach those who are not oppressed. Accountability among straight people helps build a movement that is a true partnership rather than one-way relationship.

Participants framed their relation to systems of inequity in very different ways as seen in the various motivations for allyhood. For the participants who were allies for their friend they view allyhood as something they do for a friend. This individualistic conceptualization puts blinders up to the larger systems at play that are impacting their friend. These individuals then do not see how they are connected and thus will not as easily be able to support larger reform. This contrasts aspiring allies for others, allies for others, and aspiring allies for social justice who all

framed allyhood as something they do for others. Although these participants saw themselves as having a more active role in creating structural change, they still tended to frame larger change for others and not themselves. Only the participants who were allies for social justice placed their self-interest in liberation. This motivation creates the most potential to build authentic coalitions because the straight allies see how their humanity is harmed when all are not given equity.

Motivation for allyhood is important to understand as a process. Unlike Edward's conceptualization this framework shows more nuance in how participants place themselves in larger heterosexist systems. When having close friendships across difference it is important to understand the ways in which friends with privilege view the oppression their friends face and see personal responsibility to take action around larger injustice.

Discussion and Analysis of Chapter 1 and Chapter 2

Examining heterosexual authorship and allyhood motivation together reveals a pattern that as participants had a more resistant heterosexual authorship their motivation for allyhood was based less individualistically and motivated more by social justice values. Participants who did not have a strong anti-heterosexist belief system guiding how they understood their straight identity were more likely to see allyhood in an individualistic conceptualization. Of the six participants with compliant authorship five were allies for friends (the other, Monica was an aspiring ally for social justice) (see Appendix 5). The trend may indicate that a lack of critique around systems in developing your own sense of self and privilege carries over into how you feel about LGBTQ individuals and their interaction with structural oppression.

The inverse was also true, participants who had a consistent resistant belief system guiding how they understood their straight identity were more likely to see allyhood in a collective liberation sense. Of the three participants with resistant authorship two were allies for

social justice (the other, Aida, was an ally for others) (see Appendix 5). This trend may show that as you are more active in developing your own understanding of being straight you are more likely to realize there are systems in place that are not working for you either. Even though both Adrienne and Alexis have heterosexual privilege, they commented on how the heterosexist system was limiting and hurtful. Alexis in particular had development based in experiences with heterosexism when peers would put down her style of dress and call her a lesbian. Her reaction to this behavior was to challenge the expectations of what it means to be a straight woman rather than to conform. This set her on a path to construct straightness in her own terms, and a part of that was to be an ally.

Participants with a developing heterosexual authorship had the widest variety on the spectrum of motivation for LGBTQ allyhood but the majority, seven out of eleven, were aspiring allies for social justice: one participant, Skye was an ally for friend, one participant, Sydney, was an aspiring ally for others, two participants were allies for others (see Appendix D). This gave way to a correlation of developing heterosexual authorship and aspiring ally for social justice, which hints that an inconsistent anti-heterosexist belief system carries over to not always effectively see and/or invest self in allyhood process. Many of these participants knew that there were heterosexist systems in place that gave them privilege, or allowed them to be seen as the norm. However, most participants with developing heterosexual authorship did not consider how this impacted their lives unless they spoke in contrast about what things they had access to that their gay friend did not. The constant comparison nullifies understanding that heterosexism harms everyone.

Dismantling heterosexism should be in everyone's self-interest especially straight women. We suffer a loss of authenticity and humanity from benefiting from inequity in our

society (Edwards, 2006). But also, straight women are very constrained by the feminine and masculine roles enforced by heterosexism. The intersection of being a woman and straight places us in a position where we hold many aspects of straight privilege but our position as women in straight culture constrains how we can live and express ourselves fully. These roles were seen in the many ways participants discussed a pressure to act or look a certain way to be seen as straight women. This performance was usually for straight men and not always enjoyed by straight women. Not only was performance limited by a pressure to conform to a certain way to be straight but also it placed barriers to form authentic relationships with straight men, often based out of fear and mistrust (To be discussed more in depth in Chapter 3). Our ability to be ourselves and relate to others is largely affected by heterosexism. This should be a further rallying call to challenge heterosexism. An increased self-interest in challenging heterosexism also can decrease feelings that the work around allyhood is for a friend, or for others (LGBQ individuals). Although straight women still need to be conscious around straight privilege, we must begin to realize this is our fight too.

To escape and deviate from heterosexists standard we need to raise consciousness around the systems in place that stripe us of our full humanity. A part of privilege is that it is hard to see. Many participants commented that the opportunity to talk about their identities with others in class helped them develop an understanding of their straight privilege. Of the twenty participants, eleven had taken at least one Women's Studies class (of these women four were Women's Studies majors/minors). Five participants commented that they had a class other than Women's Studies that helped them reflect on their identities, leaving only four participants who had never had a class that prompted them to think about their identity. The high number of participants with academic interest in identity is likely due to the recruitment methods of this

thesis. This may be why so many participants had language like privilege, oppression, bias, discrimination, etc. to talk about their experiences and the way they see the world. For the participants who did not have this language it was much harder from them to articulate an understanding of larger systems, which in turn meant they did not have the reflection and critique to be allies for social justice. It is important to note how many participants did have tools to talk about identity because this sample may not reflect all straight college-age millennial women. Future studies may want to examine heterosexual authorship and allyhood motivation of participants who do not have as much formal training around identity.

Race influencing understanding of heterosexual authorship should also be explored more in future studies. The women of color had a wide distribution of authorship, two women of color were external, three were developing, and two were internal heterosexual authorship. This contrasts earlier research that people of color usually develop a more compliant authorship because of the ways others treat them and the ways in which they manage these perceptions (Jones, 2009). This difference in findings may indicate that heterosexual authorship as a model highlights intersectionality in new ways because it centers on how people develop understanding around identities they have privilege in. The women of color often commented that they faced additional stereotypes about what it means to be a straight woman of color that prompted them to make meaning for themselves. White participants, on the other hand, did not comment on needing to navigate or make meaning of straight white culture. This is most likely due to white participants socialization that to be a straight woman, is to be a white straight woman. Thus the intersection of privilege (straight) and oppression (woman), and privilege (white) may not help prompt consistent anti-heterosexist values guiding sense of heterosexual identity, the way the

intersection of privilege (straight) and oppression (woman), and oppression (person of color) might.

The unique influence of the intersection of race on allyhood motivation is unclear. Similar to the white participants, the women of color's authorship seemed to have some correlations to their motivation for LGBTQ allyhood. Two women of color were allies for friend, one ally for others, three aspiring allies for social justice, and one ally for social justice. A larger participant pool in future studies may be able to show if the intersection of race has additional influence on top of heterosexual authorship in determining a participant's motivation for LGBTQ allyhood. Furthermore, more research on race should seek out diversity in participants of color. Not only do the few participants of color limit the understanding of race in this study but also by putting them all together as one category. Future studies should examine people of different racial backgrounds separately as a way to expand understanding of race and challenge collapsing race.

Heterosexual authorship is a crucial addition to identity development models because it shows how those with privilege feel invested in constructing an identity they have been socialized not to think about. The fact there is a correlation between heterosexual authorship and allyhood motivation may be a strong indicator of how people understand their own privilege impacts how they act in relationships across difference.

Chapter 3: The normalization of the gay best friend

The previous chapters helped explain how straight women see straight privilege, and how GMSW friendships are framed within larger social constructs of privilege and oppression. In this chapter, I will shift to focus both on how privilege and oppression influences GMSW, as well as the larger social context these relationships are situated in. Previous research the relationship between straight women and gay men has consistently been framed as a fag hag (the straight woman), substituting a gay friend for a romantic relationship with a straight man that she cannot attain (Maitland, 1991, Castro-Convers, 2005, Bartlett et al. 2009). This conceptualization has not been explored for the millennial generation. As mentioned in the introduction, the relationship between straight women and gay men is becoming more and more represented in the media. The generation of women born in the late 1980s to 2000s has grown up with examples of sexy, fun, straight women with gay friends in television and movies. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how the old fag hag conceptualization is no longer relevant to this demographic. Whereas the fag hag used to be a friend in a gay culture, now the gay best friend centers on straight women having a gay best friend in straight culture.

Additionally, I will show how these friendships were all very reactionary to heterosexism even though participants were fairly conscious of their straight privilege and were all striving to be allies to some extent. Similar patterns in relationships were found in participants who had resistant, developing, and compliant heterosexual authorship, as well as all different types of motivation to be allies. This finding suggest that the way straight women conceptualize their own straight identity and frame allyhood has little bearing to how heterosexism and sexism are reproduced in their friendships with gay men.

Through this chapter I will show how relationships with straight men served as an influential backdrop for how participants made meaning of their friendships with gay men. I will also show how interactions with gay friends (as reported by participants) often reinforced normative male gender performance, rather than broke away from them. I will also demonstrate how these relationships are framed in a straight culture, a reaction to heterosexist norms, and reproducing sexism and heterosexism in new ways, this creates concern in the ways these relationships have been normalized that hamper radical potential.

The Gay Best Friend framed in Straight Culture

Anna described it well when she said, “I think a lot of women, and this isn't necessarily me, but a lot of straight women are romanticized by the gay best friend ‘Everyone wants a gay best friend!’” Gay best friend was frequently used to describe the relationship straight women have with gay men but the term fag hag was not used a single time! About half of participants explicitly stated “gay best friend” during the interview. The gay best friend as an epithet cannot stand as a label on its own, it must be connected to the friend; a best friend to a straight woman. This defines gay men through their straight women friends rather than a name that allows them to be defined on their own. Additionally, the term is loaded with preconceived notions of what a gay best friend acts like, looks like, and enjoys doing. More than half of participants discussed the stereotypical gay best friends as someone who likes to go shopping, gossip and dance. Although many participants were critical of this term (to be discussed below) the fairly frequent use demonstrates its conceptualization is a part of these college age millennial women’s culture and the term fag hag is no longer relevant.

Leeya felt honored to have not just one but two gay friends. In discussing the diversity at her high school, Leeya talked about how her high school exposed her to different types of people that her friends in Greek Life in college haven't had familiarity with:

But I think having gay friends and having a black friend and being exposed to lots of different cultures, it kind of blows my mind when people say, "oh I wish I had a gay friend" and I'm like oh yeah I have two. I guess I take it for granted.

Leeya feels lucky that her friend group is not as homogeneous as her sorority sisters but in many ways Leeya's feeling of luck is based on having something her other straight women friends want but can't have. Doing so treats her friendships as a hot commodity rather than complex relationships. Although she did not use the term gay best friend here, Leeya calling her two friends her gay friends has a similar impact because it conjures up a sense that they belong to her.

Nicole emphasized how only certain aspects of gay culture are acknowledged in straight culture when talking about bringing her gay friend to her sorority formal where many of her straight women friends are homophobic.

But most of the time I prefer to take a gay guy because they are able to fit in easier with my friendships and relationships. Especially in my group of friends, people are pretty accepting whether or not they agree with it.

The fact that Nicole said her gay friend fits in better in her friend group than a straight man demonstrates how the gay best friend is a part of straight women's culture. The acceptance of the gay best friend as an individual without seeing ties to this person's identity and larger societal issues demonstrates the tension of incorporating them into straight culture without full acceptance of the complexity of them as a gay individual and a human being. This divide is clear when Nicole talks about her straight women friends who only want to see a snapshot of gay culture through their select gay best friends:

I have a few friends who are in my sorority who are very conservative, about political, social beliefs, are friends with a very select group of gay men. But I think those relationships come with, again it's something they themselves, can't embrace, so they live vicariously through those relationships. So maybe they don't agree with it but it doesn't affect their everyday lives so they enjoy hearing about it and enjoy seeing how those relationships... You know their life experiences pan out because it's something, they can't or don't experience

For these friends there is a stark line between where their straight culture and beliefs start and their gay best friend enters. They view their friend as a window into seeing gay culture without really having to consider the ways their straight privilege is tied to the marginalization and oppression of their friend. This ability to interact with an individual and not the full system echoes back to compliant heterosexual authorship that does not critique heterosexism. Nicole is not describing her own friendship like this but she also did not add any commentary that what her friends are thinking or doing is hurtful.

Unlike Leeya and Nicole, Sydney was very critical of the “sorority type girls” who want a gay best friend:

Like sorority girls aren't seeking out lesbian best friends, they aren't seeking out queer women. So when you say gay best friend, it's assumed gay is exclusively a male.... Like do they just want it to say “they have it” or “oh I'm not homophobic”

She felt upset that these women would live in an environment where everyone around them is similar and only incorporate gay friends into their world if it was “on their terms”. To her these straight women had fake relationships. Sydney was one of the few participants to report having a close friendship with a queer woman of color. To her these straight “sorority type” women are far from accepting because they aren't interested in befriending lesbian and queer women, but are interested in the romanticized gay male friend. The designation of a gay best friend as only gay men raises a lot of concern for Sydney because she sees how this one prototype of what it means to be gay is included into straight culture where other identities are not. This selective

interest in gay culture is a testament to how the gay best friend is fitting into straight culture and the “sorority type girls” are not trying to mold or even interact with gay culture. Sydney sees these women benefiting from these types of relationships by having an (false) image that they are accepting and understanding. Unlike the fag hag, who had many negative connotations (ugly, pathetic, lonely), straight women in the millennial generation are designating straight women with gay best friends with positive connotations.

Stephanie was not in a sorority but she used the term gay best friend, without seeing a difference between best friend and gay best friend. In the interview she talked about the experience of being challenged by her friend, Scott, over this.

“Yeah you are my gay best friend.” He was like, “Oh that's all I am, just your gay best friend.” And it was jokingly. I was thinking he's my best friend too... I felt bad. I didn't want to put him in a box. I don't want gay best friend to mean something different than best friend.

The additional label inherently distinguished him as an “other” even though Stephanie did not want to put Scott in a box. Sydney needed to highlight Scott as gay to show that he is an anomaly compared to her friendships with straight people. For Stephanie the distinction shows that he is a man in her life that she feels safe around and enjoys to spend time with. At the same time, for Scott his gay identity is highlighted as something that makes him less than “a best friend”. The qualification hurts because Scott is segmented by his gay identity instead of being viewed as a complete and complex person.

Adrienne framed straight women who seek out gay best friends for the sake of having a gay best friend, as needing validation.

Because you see it on TV it's like I need to get one too. And that's how I've seen it or how it's come across because in the US context we tend to like, I don't know, model our lives after what we see on TV, especially people we respect or we follow on blogs or on television. It's kind of like the little dog that every girl has in her purse, the dog that you

take everywhere... It's quite sad actually... I guess people maybe try to feel validated, and keep up with whomever they are trying to keep up with

For Adrienne, the trend is a direct result of straight women copying other straight women. The gay man becomes an object to be paraded around in straight culture as an accessory. For example, if a straight woman admires Rachel from *Glee*, in order to keep up with this celebrity she may want to have a friend like Kurt. For these straight women having the gay friend becomes about them and their image, rather than the friendship.

The ways we label individuals in GMSW is very telling to the differences in how these relationships are being conceptualized. Fag hag, more often than not, was a derogatory term, used to put-down and to isolate these women (Moon, 1995). This millennial defining though, does not give these straight women any name instead the centering is on the gay best friend. This demonstrates no shaming of the straight women who have gay best friends, which in turn shows normalization of this friendship pairing.

Not a threat: Reactionary deviation that reproduces and reinforces heterosexist and sexist norms

The influence of heterosexism was not limited to GMSW relationships being formed in straight spaces. The power dynamics participants and their gay friends feel with straight men constantly impacted how straight women felt with gay men and vice versa. The mantra that gay men were not a threat epitomizes how the GMSW relationship is a reaction to the heterosexual relationship. Participants often discussed not needing to worry that their gay male friends were going to try to hook up with them. For Violet not having this fear allowed her to get close with her gay friend.

Sometimes I feel like I'm keeping, so I have a boyfriend, so I feel like you, there's always a part of you that is keeping your straight male friends at arm's length. Like you don't want, like you want to make sure that's nothing that becomes sexual about it. So I wonder

if maybe, when my friends came out to me, we got closer because I wasn't like...we can snuggle or whatever on the sofa and I don't have to worry about giving you the wrong impression

Violet does not need to have her guard up around gay men unlike forming relationships with straight men. The belief that there would be “nothing going on” between Violet and a gay men, is a starting point for the friendship not only for Violet’s sense of security but for the way it may be perceived by others. The belief that all cross-gender relationships will have some aspect of sexual tension is not being challenged through these GMSW friendships and instead is passively reinforced. Violet is able to have close friends with gay men in reaction to heterosexist culture. This demonstrates how GMSW relationships are influenced by heterosexism and may not be contributing new ways to challenge assumptions about cross-gender and cross-orientation friendships in other contexts.

For Aida, the threat of straight men was more about sexual assault than being perceived as having something romantic going on. Aida’s describes her comfort working alone with her friend Brent late at night.

I felt safe and knew that no matter where we were or what time of night it was or whatever, I would never, my sexuality would never be compromised. He was never going to try something. You know I just think about in one office we worked in, it was the bottom floor, in this back office, in the back end of the hallway. I would think about what if I had been there, we often worked at three in the morning. What if I had been there with a guy?... You never know. I think especially in this environment where we didn't know each other before. We came into this professionally.

Because Aida knew that Brent was gay, she did not fear him assaulting her. Although gay men have and do sexually assault straight women, Aida does not perceive him as a threat. Like Violet, Aida was able to let her guard down and not be fearful around Brent. This feeling leads Aida to think of what it would have been like if she was down there with a (straight) guy, dismissing the fact that Brent is a guy. This heterosexist remark is one of the many ways that straight women

erase male identity from their gay friends. Interestingly enough though, Aida goes on to say in that same train of thought, that she was glad she had a man around to protect her:

I always felt like I had a guy around, so in case someone came in he could beat them up or something, so I always felt safe but not like, I knew the cause of that kind of issue.

This shows the tension between not thinking of Brent as a guy because she assumes he won't assault her and knowing he is a guy because he could physically protect her and keep her safe. This example demonstrates how GMSW relationships are a reaction to sexism, women fear assault from straight men but also are reinforcing sexism and heterosexism, as seen in not acknowledging Brent's gender and assuming he will feel safe and capable physically fighting someone.

Participants also discussed gay men as not a threat through not feeling a pressure to impress their gay male friends allowing them to be themselves. Jade talked about how when she goes out at night with Martin, she doesn't feel as much pressure to look or act a certain way.

I feel like I don't need to impress. So when I go out with Martin I still get ready and stuff, and look good. But there is no pressure, like, what should I say? Because I'm not romantically interested in him and I don't want anything more serious than a friendship. So I don't get nervous or feel pressure to be a certain way.

Jade explains how she feels around Martin by explaining the lack of anxiety present in their relationship is another way GMSW relationships are formed as an antithesis of what relationships are like with straight men. Jade remarked in other parts of the interview how comfortable she feels around her straight women friends but when talking about going out at night with Martin she choose to compare him to straight men. Straight women with gay friends often frame their relationship as cross-gender, contrasting gay men to straight men, rather than seeing the relationship on its own terms.

Megan also talked about a greater sense of comfort with her friend Ryan.

What I've been thinking, I don't know if this is true at all but deep down I feel more comfortable because I feel that I don't have to prove myself or be this ideal woman or something, or how society dictates, usually by men, what they want me to be. So like also I don't feel sexually threatened. Even with some of my friends it's always a possibility and I'm not going to let down my guard. But with Ryan I know, a) that's not who he is and b) that's not who he's into anyways.

For Megan, the lack of threat is both security in knowing a hook-up is not desired and the release from heterosexist and sexist expectations as a woman. For both Jade and Megan, how they feel around straight men is an antecedent to how they feel and act around gay men. The latter is constructed based on the former. When relationships between straight women and gay men become the antithesis of relationships between straight women and straight men, we lose potential to see these relationships as spaces for new cross-gender, cross-orientation reactions and not just a space where straight women feel the opposite of how they feel around straight men with gay men. The constant contrast also ignores the ways that gay men can and do assault straight women and hold them to standards of an “ideal woman.”

Participants also reported that straight women were not a threat to gay men. This dynamic fits with previous research that straight men are aggressors in the lives of gay men (Wilson, 2010). This demonstrates again that the GMSW is being viewed as an antithesis of straight relationships allowing for the recreation of sexism and heterosexism to go overlooked. For instance, straight women often referenced their maternal femininity as a means for gay men to connect and befriend straight women. Michelle described what several participants also articulated; straight guys are not comfortable being friends with gay guys, but straight women are.

I don't know. I guess for some of the same reasons. Girls are more likely to listen to your feelings than guys are. I also think sometimes straight guys are weird about gay guys. Especially when you are younger, middle school and high school, I don't want people to think I'm gay so I shouldn't hang out with gay guys. You don't want other people to think

you're gay so that would make a straight guy less likely to seek out a friendship with a gay guy.

Although socialization may lead women to be better listeners it should not be an excuse or barrier for straight men to build relationships across difference and listen. In many ways, GMSW relationships reacting to the sexism and heterosexism experienced in relationships with straight men is a mechanism to not hold straight men accountable for their actions in relationships. Wouldn't it be ideal if all relationships were based in safety, comfort and respect? Also, a fear of being hit on is influencing many of cross-gender and cross-orientation friendships. Participants reported feeling safer around gay men because they perceive they won't get hit on, and also reported their gay friends felt safer around straight women because they won't feel ostracized and harassed from a straight men's homophobia. Straight men are not a part of these relationships but their significance is great enough to prevent these friendships from being established on their own terms.

Touching: GMSW reproducing heterosexuality with hints of resistance

The way these friends touched and flirted was another aspect of these relationships that was a reaction to straight relationships, reproducing heterosexuality. More than half of participants felt that touching was a way they could connect with their friend. Alexis described how she and her gay friends would often make out in a party environment for fun. She described this type of affection as not having any emotion attached to it.

For me, it's fun for me because I... You can't do that with a straight man or even I don't know. There's always emotion involved. Like "Oh you made out with that person, that must mean that you're attracted to them but then I don't know with whenever I'm just making out with my gay friends, it's always sort of funny, we joke about it. It's like we're close, it's easy to do that, we're friends, we're buddies yeah.

Instead of feeling like these "make-outs" were sexually charged or had greater meaning, Alexis defined them as fun. As described by Alexis, this experience was mutually silly and based in a

shared sense of friendship. This pushes back on the idea that all erotic behavior needs to have a special meaning and consequences. Alexis has sexual agency in enjoying this experience without shame or guilt. In these ways, kissing in GMSW relationships challenges notions of what it means to be erotic with someone. However, the fact that “it’s easy to do” is rooted in this behavior occurring between a man and a woman. So although it may be breaking some boundaries, it can be read as a performance of heterosexuality.

Nicole also felt very comfortable making out with her gay friends.

I like to hold hands, or touch, I've made out with several of my gay male friends in public, in private, whatever, I don't think twice about it. But I'm definitely more affectionate to gay men than I am towards straight men. (...) Whereas gay men are much more welcoming and open to that, like touching and feeling and affection. They like that, they like to hug. And most gay men like to have their arm around women, whatever.

In Nicole’s relationship, a performance of heterosexuality (touching and kissing) takes place in in both public and private, indicating this type of touching is not only frequent, but done in environments where others may not be watching. She is so accustomed to this type of affection that she reads gay men as more open to physical intimacy with straight women than straight men. This in many ways erases the fact that her gay friends are not attracted to women. Even though they may enjoy putting “their arms around women” it seems paradoxical to say they enjoy it more than straight men who are attracted to women. Nicole may be projecting this because she herself feels more comfortable being affectionate with gay men than straight men. Although she did not disclose this, it may be the case for her and other straight women, that this type affection with gay men is consistently reciprocated. The fear of rejection is not as high allowing for a heterosexual performance that is safe and fun, even if it lacks the erotic passion in a heterosexual relationship.

Like Alexis and Nicole, Jessica had fun being flirtatious with her friend Chris:

Like I mean you can mess with their hair. You can flirt in the way that you could flirt with a straight guy without it being serious I guess. I can see why a lot of people would find that fun. At the same time I don't know if that would be the same on the other end, from a gay man's perspective. I've never really thought about this, but is it fun for them to flirt with girls? Even if they don't necessarily feel attracted to girls?

Jessica talks about enjoying being able to treat her guy friend like a straight guy without any worries. Like Nicole, treating her gay friend as straight erases his sexual agency. Straight women are enforcing a compulsory heterosexuality on their gay friends by assuming that they must enjoy this type of flirting. More often than not, touching in GMSW is mimicking a compulsory heterosexuality rather than pushing the boundaries of what touching and intimacy in friendships can look like.

Reproducing sexism: Gay men as mentors

One of the most striking normative gender expectations being reinforced in GMSW relationships was through the way gay men mentored and were treated as mentors, on straight women's confidence, dating, and appearance. Gay men helped reinforce that men are authoritative, instead of GMSW relationships serving as a place to break that expectation. In turn, straight women glorified their input rather than challenge it. Often, the content of the advice was seen as more valid because it was coming from a man.

Skye talked about how advice about heterosexual relationships was more believable coming from her gay friends:

The one thing I can definitely think of and it hasn't just been advice to me but it's been advice from some of our other female friends. They would say stuff like 'this guy isn't really into you, why are you doing whatever.. As a guy I know'... You can obviously see that he is a male; you believe it more, than if a female said it. I think another thing is that they are the type of people who don't hide anything. They are very honest, whereas if I try to say something to another female, I'm going to try to be nice about it because I don't want to hurt their feelings. That's not the issue. They want to make sure you understand it and don't care if you get hurt in the process because they know you will get hurt more by staying or talking with this kind of person.

Skye was quick to look to her gay friends for advice on dating and they were quick to claim themselves as an authority on dating, “as a guy I know.” Skye reinforces sexism that women need men by praising that the advice is better because it comes from a man. Considering her women friends have experience dating straight men, it seems counter-productive to minimize their perspective as useful. Skye also trusted the masculine means in which her gay friends communicated this advice. Unlike her female friends who might “be nice,” her gay friends will tell it like it is whether or not she will be hurt by their opinion. The masculine style and the advice coming from a man are idealized.

Like Skye, Stephanie claimed that she was able to trust her gay friend’s advice about her appearance more than her own opinion:

He'll dress me and I'll look much better than I originally intended. Like I was wearing a button down shirt with a scarf and he told me, ‘No no, you should button it up all the way and take off the scarf’. And it looked much better. And it's interesting that he can see that.

Gay men dressing straight women reinforces that what it means to look good is still defined by a man’s gaze. This finding compliment’s previous research surrounding straight women feeling more attractive from having close gay male friend’s affirm their fashion and body (Bartlett et al., 2009). Scott told her that the reason he is so good at judging appearance is because he still retains some heterosexuality:

And Scott said well deep down I think every gay man, there is a hint of a heterosexual male and they can see things in that light... That he can see what a heterosexual man would be attracted to. He said this before that he can see when a woman is really attractive but also when a man is really attractive.

Scott’s statement may allude to how his early socialization was not just as a man, but as a straight man, which helps him understand the expectations women should hold up for men (Cass, 1984). However, this statement better reflects how gay men still retain male privilege. They are able to freely judge women and comment on their bodies, regardless of how they identify. Scott

feels entitled to designate what is really attractive about a woman, and then enforce it on his friend Stephanie, instead of challenging his role as a man to judge in the first place,

Nicole also felt more in touch with her femininity when her gay friends guided her wardrobe

I think at times it has made me more feminine. Let's say I'm going to class and I'm wearing sweatpants for the fifth day, but one of my gay friends would be like, 'why don't you wear this really cute shirt or why don't you like put on some make-up, or why don't you go get a pedicure.' You know that kind of thing? It makes me embrace it a little more because they will call me out on it. So some of those outside factors, and a lot of them take really great care of themselves and a lot of it is about self-care I guess. Like it makes me think more about those things. But it does make me more competent in being a woman.

Nicole's friends feel entitled to comment on and police how Nicole dresses. She appreciates their input instead of being frustrated with them. Her ability to be more of a woman centers on this feminine gender appearance and performance of listening to what men want women to do. The pressure to remain feminine is still being enforced in these relationships even though many participants claimed to feel more comfortable around gay men.

Overall, participants were not concerned about this sexist mentorship dynamic. Leeya said that this type of advice was not only fun and helpful but making straight women better.

I just think that it's like a fun.. there is idea out there that it's fun for straight women to have gay friends and they are always happy and will make you better and whatever. I feel like with shows and movies, if someone is broken up with it's like let's go to the gay bar no one is going to hit on you there. So the gay men have a little meeting and they are like, "oh god we got another one, let's go cheer this bitch up".

Leeya sees gay men as being a resource for straight women to navigate and conform to sexist and heterosexist norms.

If we want to move away from gendered and sexist relationships we will need to rethink the spaces in which GMSW relationships are formed, how they react to other relationships, and the mechanisms that make it easy for sexism and heterosexism to be reproduced. Even though

these relationships are adjusted in certain ways they are still reinforcing sexist and heterosexist roles.

Discussion and Analysis of Chapter 3

Analyzing the current relationships between straight women and gay men suggests that GMSW friendships no longer are pushing towards being radical but instead mimicking and reacting to heterosexual relationships and the friendships between straight women and straight men. As mentioned earlier, not a single woman used the word fag hag throughout this study. The absence of the term in a study about straight women and gay men has not been examined in current literature. Although many similarities remain about these friendships (the closeness, trust, mutual enjoyment) the distinctions between the gay man and his fag hag, and the straight woman and her gay best friend shed light on where this type of friendship fits in the current generation.

Fag hags were characterized as feeling exclusion from heterosexist and sexist culture and then found solace with their gay friends, often in designated gay spaces (Moon, 1995). On the other hand, in the present study, straight women with gay best friends are described as selectively choosing to embrace aspects of gay culture in their straight world. While the fag hag only exists in gay culture, the gay best friend only exists in straight culture. This positions the straight woman with power to set the terms for how much of her friend's identity she will embrace, all the while constantly marginalizing him by calling him a gay best friend.

The striking separation of straight women from the gay culture is dangerous, because it creates space for straight women to claim selective ownership of gay culture. Previous research commented that straight women were often tourists to gay culture by going out with their gay friends (Moon, 1995). However, now straight women are able to be tourists on their own turf. No longer are straight women interacting with large groups of gay men, like the fag-hag was. Instead

most straight women only have a handful of gay friends that they primarily hang out with in straight groups or one-on-one. This dynamic allows interaction across sexual orientation but is contained in the context of straightness. The fag-hag pushed boundaries (for better or for worst) by entering gay communities, raising the question of who really belongs. Straight women today do not need to ask if they belong because interactions takes place mostly in straight spaces, allowing them to ignore their straight privilege in many ways.

Even if most GMSW today take place in straight spaces, it is expected there will be a lot of variation in what this looks like. This study focused on straight spaces in college settings but even within this construct there were differences. Three participants all gave examples of women in a sorority interacting with gay men. Often women in sororities face a unique culture of heterosexism and sexism that demeans them as immature and superficial, (e.g., the term sorority *girls*). This culture of sexism experienced by these women may be creating a unique type of heterosexism and sexism that gay men are interacting with and should be explored more in future research.

The context of interpersonal relationships across difference is important to understand because these relationships have strong potential to disrupt heterosexist and sexist narratives. In this study we saw how GMSW taking place in straight places, reinforced sexism and heterosexism. The normalization of the gay best friend is narrowing the ways in which straight women will interact with gay culture and push the boundaries of gender and sexual orientation. This leaves us following the dominant discourse.

Conclusion

The prevalence of GMSW friendships in the millennial generation is a unique opportunity to raise questions around how friendships can reflect society's views around gender and sexual orientation but also potentially push for transformative change around identity. Studying this personal relationship can be a site for understanding larger shifts in our culture and our politics. Feminist studies have always valued taking the "personal as political". Through examination of these personal relationships it was clear that larger structures of oppression and privilege influence how straight women and gay men relate to one another. Millennial GMSW relationships were found to perpetuate sexism and heterosexism rather than radicalize gender and sexual orientation structures. These findings raise some important questions about how we need to think about privilege, allyhood, and friendships across identity.

First, straight privilege needs to be studied to better understand how those with privilege learn and unlearn their identity. Heterosexual authorship offers an identity development model that not only looks at how active individuals are in constructing meaning of their identity but also whether individuals shed socialized messages around their identity. This model places importance on the process as well as the content of developing a straight identity that is anti-heterosexist. Privileged people need to actively shape their identities as a part of resistance to their socialization. Failure to do so will perpetuate injustice.

Second, we need self-interest in our allyhood. This study found that many straight women are motivated to be allies in ways that perpetuate power relations between those with straight privilege and those without. This was seen in the ways participants were allies for their friends and relied on those who are oppressed to direct and teach them. It was also seen in the way participants were allies for others and strived to assimilate non-straight people within the

current structure, perpetuating unjust heterosexist systems. If we want to change the current inequities in our society it will be important for straight women to realize that straight privilege is not ours to begin with and therefore not ours to give away or share. We must strive for a society where no one has unearned privilege. Participants who were motivated by self-interest in bringing about change had a motivation for allyhood that was most effective at dismantling oppressive structures. For these participants there was a real sense of urgency to uproot the current way we go about social issues surrounding gender and sexual orientation.

Finally, the relationships between GMSW need to push back on how we view those categories of what it means to be a woman, man, straight, and gay. These categories were reinforced in new ways, instead of finding ways to dismantle these categories and make them new. The original construction of the fag hag pushed back on heterosexism, the heterosexist system was not working for fag hags either! This is not happening in today's generation of straight women with gay friends. As gay rights are being framed more and more as assimilation into the progressive agenda, we will need spaces and individuals to radicalize the notions of sexual orientation and gender. Failure to do so will result in heterosexism and sexism perpetuated not only in interpersonal relationships but larger laws, policies, and culture.

Friendships across identity are important to study because they are spaces for coalitions to form. It is promising that so many millennial straight women are developing these types of relationships. As seen in participants' heterosexual authorship and desire to be allies these relationships can be one site for learning about identity and thinking about larger systems in our society. Attitudes about difference are changing and this is promising. As the gay male identity is becoming increasingly normalized (Duggan, 2004), and sexism and heterosexism are perpetuated in many ways throughout our society, it will be crucial to continue to look towards personal

relationships as a site for where radical societal transformation can take place. Straight women's intent to unlearn heterosexist messages and support for those who are marginalized by sexual orientation demonstrates how GMSW friendships have potential to be strong personal coalitions that also push for structural changes.

Appendix A
Recruitment Email

Subject: Women's Studies Thesis Participant Recruitment

Are you a straight woman with a close gay male friend?

If so, please share your thoughts with me on your friendship, own identity, and experiences in college. This interview study is conducted through the Department of Women's Studies for an undergraduate thesis.

To participate you must be

- Between 18-25 years old
- Identify as a straight woman
- Have at least one gay male friend who you have been close with for at least one year and who is also 18-25 years old
- Participate in a 45-75 minute audio-recorded interview

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You and all persons mentioned in the interview will remain confidential. You may answer as many questions as you feel comfortable during the interview.

Please contact me at 734-XXX-XXXX or at gayfriendstudy@gmail.com for more information.
Thank you

Appendix B
Participant Consent to Participate in Research Study

You are invited to participate in a study surrounding friendship across sexual orientation and identity development in college. The purpose of the project is to learn more about straight women's understanding of their social identities in college in relation to their relationships with gay men. **Please use either a pseudonym or no name when talking about your friend.** This is a student-initiated study that involves research that will be used in an undergraduate honors thesis submitted to the University of Michigan Women's Studies Department.

You are invited to:

- Participate in an **audio taped**, semi-structured, 45-75 minute interview; meaning you will be asked open-ended questions from a prepared list but will be able to direct the interview as much or as little as you would like. You may also be asked follow-up questions on things you previously said.
- ***Allow your audio taped interview (without your name on it) to be transcribed and coded for research purposes.***

Your participation will involve the following:

- Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and you can withdraw your consent at anytime.
- You must be 18 years old to participate.
- You must identify as a straight woman
- You must have at least one gay male friend that you feel you have been close with for at least one year.
- Your responses in the interview will be kept strictly confidential. This means your name and any names you mention in the interview will not be connected to your name in research reports.
- You can expect to be asked open-ended questions about coming to college, your social identities (i.e. gender, race, sexual orientation), developing a relationship with a gay male friend, friends, family, and college life.
- You may refuse to answer any question at any time, for any reason, without consequence.
- You may end the interview at any time, for any reason, without consequence
- Potential risks of this study involve becoming uncomfortable or emotional with the content of interviews and reputational damage affiliated with involvement.
- Potential benefits of this study are getting to discuss important issues like identity, friendships across sexual orientation, and college in a safe environment. Also, contributing to knowledge about women's perspectives on identity and sexuality.
- Consenting to having your **interview recorded is mandatory** for participation in this study and a typed transcript will be made. The transcript will not contain your name or other identifying information and will be stored on the student investigator's personal password-protected laptop.
- Data gathered in the course of this study will be kept securely until the completion of the thesis, after which point all data (written and electronic) except the thesis (and drafts) will be immediately destroyed.

- You may contact the student investigator, Amy Navvab, any time at amynav@umich.edu or by calling 734-276-2132 for questions and information related to interviews or this study. The faculty advisor for this study is Professor Nadine Hubbs; she can be reached at nhubbs@umich.edu
- Should you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in research, please contact the Institutional Review Board, Behavioral Sciences, 540 E. Liberty 202, Ann Arbor, MI 48104, (734) 936-0933, email: irbhsbs@umich.edu
- You will be given a copy of this form after you have signed it
- This consent form will be kept in a file separate from other research related papers. Only the student investigator will have access to the consent form.

Please check below if you agree to participate in this research project:

____ I have read this document and agree to participate in this research project

Appendix C Interview Protocol

1. Identity

- What does it mean to you to be a straight woman?
- What messages have you received about being a straight woman?
 - [Follow up to make sure “straight” and “woman” are each explained.]
 - How do you think you fit in these messages?
- What is easy about being a straight woman?
- What is difficult about being a straight woman?
- Are there any other identities that are really important to you?

2. Friendship Development/Relation to other Relationships?

- Can you tell me a little about your closest gay male friend? (Personality? Interests?)
- What do you value most about your friendship?
- How did you become close friends?
- Can you tell me about a time when you realized you were close friends?
- Now, think about some of your other close friends. How does your relationship with your gay male friend compare?
- Now, think specifically about your relationships with other straight men. How does your relationship with your friend compare?
- Would you say that your relationship with your friend is similar to any romantic relationships you have?
- Can you tell me about “touching” in your relationship?
- Have you ever been with your friend to an event/place where most people were not straight?
 - How did you feel in this space?
- Why would a straight woman be a close friend with a gay man?
- Why would a gay man be a close friend with a straight woman?

3. Impact of friendship on own identity

- Has your relationship with your friend made you think more about what it means to be a woman? How? In what ways? If not, why do you think that is?
- Does your relationship with your friend have an impact on how you feel about your own sexual orientation? How? In what ways? If not, why do you think that is?

4. Allyhood

- Do you think your relationship with your friend has had an impact on how you feel about people who identify as gay men?
 - What about people who identify lesbian, bisexual or queer?
- Has your friend helped you in any way to form other relationships across difference?
- How do you react when you hear people say homophobic things?
- Do you feel that you and your friend are equal in society?
- What is your responsibility to be supportive of your friend?
- What does the word ally mean to you?
- What needs to happen to address inequality based on gender and sexual orientation?

5. Wrap-up

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix D

Participants' Heterosexual Authorship vs. Motivation for LGBTQ allyhood				
Heterosexual Authorship				
Compliant (n=6)		Developing (n=11)		Resistant (n=3)
Jade Anna Stephanie Leeya Erica Monica		Sydney Skye Michelle Jessica Megan Elizabeth Maggie Margaret Nicole Violet Destiny		Adrienne Alexis Aida
Motivation for LGBTQ Allyhood				
Ally for friend (n=6)	Aspiring Ally for Others (n=1)	Ally for Others (n=3)	Aspiring Ally for Social Justice (n=8)	Ally for Social Justice (n=2)
Jade Skye Anna Stephanie Leeya Erica	Sydney	Jessica Aida Nicole	Michelle Megan Elizabeth Maggie Margaret Monica Violet Destiny	Adrienne Alexis

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