

**How Gay Stayed White: Millennial White Gay Men and the Production of and Resistance
to Racism, Sexism, and Heterosexism**

by

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“I want to find an antidote to the ways that whiteness numbs me, makes me not see what is right in front of me, takes away my intelligence, divides me from people I care about. I hope that, by occupying the seeming contradictions between the ‘antiracist’ and the ‘gay white male’ parts of myself, I can generate a creative tension that will motivate me to keep fighting... I want to become less invested in whiteness while staying white myself – always remembering that I can’t just decide to stand outside of whiteness or exempt myself from its unearned privileges. I want to be careful not to avoid its responsibilities by fleeing into narratives of how I have been oppressed as a gay man...”

Most of all, I want never to forget that the roots of my antiracist desires and my gay desires are intertwined. As James Baldwin’s words remind me, acting on my gay desires is about not being afraid to love and therefore about having to confront this white society’s terror of love – a terror that lashes out with racist and antigay violence. Following both my gay and antiracist desires is about being willing to ‘go the way your blood beats,’ as Baldwin puts it, even into the heart of that terror, which, he warned, is ‘a tremendous danger, a tremendous responsibility.’”

“How Gay Stays White and What Kind of White It Stays”

Allan Bérubé (2001)

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Abstract

College-aged white gay men have grown up in an environment of significant change around their gay identity and representations of white gay men. Critiques of mainstream (i.e., homonormative) images and equality movements often rightly focus on the exclusions of multiply marginalized members of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and similarly identified (LGBTQ) communities (e.g., women, queer and trans* people, and especially working class and people of Color members of LGBTQ communities) and the negative impacts that these movements have through strengthening neoliberal capitalist norms. This study focuses on the perspectives of white gay men at an elite university, providing a first glimpse into understanding the impacts of the sedimentation of homonormativity on these men while also critically investigating the maintenance and impacts of race/gender privilege. Semi-structured interviews with white gay men who are current or recent University of Michigan students ($n = 15$) were analyzed using an interpretative phenomenological analysis framework. Findings demonstrate processes of racialization/gendering of participants' relationship to their gay identity, both in terms of how they experience marginalization as well as how they resist heterosexism. In addition, findings also point to the impacts of gay identity on participants' recreation of racism, sexism, and masculinity, as well as providing a potential pathway to allyhood through recognizing shared experiences of marginalization with women and/or people of Color.

Chapter 1: Introduction

As a white male it was communicated to me that you need to be very chill, you need to play sports. If you are involved in artistic things, you need to juxtapose that with also being involved with a sport, and then you're a renaissance man. It was always this sense that you have to be the best, almost as if I was upholding something, and perhaps the construction of that attitude of just being the best or this calm superiority without boasting or bragging in conjunction of being gay gave me this sense of I have to work ten times harder than anyone else, because being gay has somehow marred or eroded or somehow destroyed part of my role as a white male. (Bradley)

We're in a unique position to challenge hierarchies of oppression as a whole, so I think that our agenda should be bringing together a more comprehensive vision for justice that brings into question race, gender, sexuality, ability status, you know, the whole range of identities, because of the fact that we have a unique command of people's attention right now, LGBTQ rights are holding a lot of attention nationally now, so I would like us to be talking a lot more about the institution of marriage – not trying to make gay marriage legalized, but in what ways does marriage promote racism, sexism, classism, etc.? And then, use the institution of marriage as an example of how do these other institutions that we just take for granted in society promote all of these –isms, as well. (Aaron)

Millennial white gay men have come of age in a time where “It Gets Better” videos play alongside news coverage of suicides by their peers. They were born around or shortly after the end of the Cold War and were young children when the War on Terror was declared. They might have grown up with *Will & Grace* playing on their TVs and *Glee* might play on them now. For those who are out, by the time they were coming to terms with their sexual identity and/or having their first sexual experiences, white gay men had attained some visibility in the public eye, albeit often limited and in highly stereotyped forms. They might have learned about the Civil Rights Movement through iconic leaders like Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks. It's less likely that they sat through similar school assemblies about Bayard Rustin.¹ In their schools, they grew up in a post-Title IX world, but it's also unlikely that many of them were taught what that meant, except perhaps that it was the reason they had to cut boys' wrestling. They also grew up

¹ Bayard Rustin was the lead organizer of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, 1963, a not so prominent but important leader of the Civil Rights Movements, and an openly gay Black man.

in an era of increasingly neoliberal² policies and norms that advance U.S. exceptionalism, militarism, and consumerism (Boggs, 2012; Duggan, 2004).

These millennial white gay men have also grown up in the context of rapidly growing and highly visible movements for ‘equality’ and ‘gay rights.’ The efforts of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and similarly identified (LGBTQ) people have spanned a diverse range of efforts to reform and dismantle systems of power and privilege, including heterosexism (Cohen, 2005); however, the most widely recognized of these efforts, especially recently, have been those that have pursued social and legal inclusion through marriage, employment non-discrimination, and military service (Bell & Binnie, 2000; Farrow, 2011; Olson, 2010; Stein, 2002). These strategies seek to not only *conform to* dominant neoliberal politics and rhetoric, but also *enhance* dominant forms of neoliberalism (Duggan, 2004). However, these movements exist alongside and are predated by radical queer liberation movements that challenge the institutions to which equality movements seek access (Cohen, 1997; Cohen, 2005; Stein, 2002). Critiques of the priorities and strategies for ‘equality’ have largely come from the those who have been excluded by these movements and stand to lose the most with the maintenance of existing institutions and norms – e.g., working class and poor people, women, trans*³ people, people of Color, bisexuals, and queer people (Bailey, Kandaswamy, & Richardson, 2004; Bell & Binnie, 2000; Farrow, 2011); however, scholars have under-investigated how the inclusion of white gay men that accompanies these exclusions has affected the identities, lives, and politics of white gay men themselves (Bérubé, 2001; Halperin, 2007).

² Neoliberalism describes a pervasive set of policies and rhetoric that favor “free trade, privatization, minimal government intervention in business, reduced public expenditure on social services, etc.” (*Dictionary.com*, 2009). “Minimal government intervention in business” often translates to policies that in actuality proactively support the interests of transnational corporations and the ruling elite.

³ Trans* is an umbrella term referring to individuals and communities who identify as transgender, gender non-conforming, genderqueer, or otherwise outside of the cisgender man/woman binary.

In order to understand these men, it is necessary to simultaneously consider the intersections of their many identities and the social, economic, and political forces that shape their lives. Gay identity in the United States has been co-constructed with racial formations (Somerville, 2000) and in the context of a capitalist system (d'Emilio, 1983) and perhaps most evidently, within systems of domination based on gender and desire (Rubin, 1984). Within these interlocking systems, white gay men have access to social, cultural, and economic power and privilege because of their race, gender, and race-gender, in addition to experiencing heterosexism. Racism, sexism, and heterosexism interact with and reinforce each other (Collins, 2000), and the works of women of Color have demonstrated that unique forms of domination are experienced at the intersections of multiple identities (Lorde, 1984; Combahee River Collective, 1981). These works, which have largely arisen from lived experiences at intersecting sites of marginalization, have propelled an understanding within feminist scholarship that emphasizes the interlocking nature of oppression (Cohen, 1997; Davis, 2009). In an act of (hopefully) productive appropriation, the present study uses an intersectional framework that builds on the importance of understanding the intersection of identities while turning to an intersection of privilege and oppression within individual subjects and communities (Pease, 2010).

Inquiring into the experiences of those with privilege is tricky territory. Authors have argued that the critical study of whiteness and masculinity represent important work into anti-racist and gender-justice projects (Berila, Keller, Krone, Laker, & Mayers, 2005; Kivel, 1995; Pease, 2010), but they also have the potential to re-affirm the privileged position of these subjects (Murphy, 2011). In navigating this relationship, the present project seeks to continually describe white gay men's identities, experiences, and perspective in terms of their access to unequal power and unearned advantages as white men, even when considering their oppression

as gay. I hope to investigate both *how* people with power and privilege can understand and navigate their multiple positions in society, and strengthen arguments as to *why* those with power and privilege need to be invested in collective liberation. Uncovering and developing these motivations can be a powerful motivating factor in developing allies among people who are societally over-advantaged (Edwards, 2006). Specifically, I pursue the questions: How are white gay men's relationships with heterosexism shaped by their power and privilege as white men? And, how does white gay men's marginal status in a heterosexist system affect their relationships with racism and sexism?

In this chapter, I begin by providing an overarching perspective on my own positionality and motivations for pursuing this project and the intersectional framework that guides this study. I then turn to existing literatures on gay identity and LGBTQ movements, whiteness, and masculinity while incorporating intersectional perspectives throughout. Finally, I conclude this first chapter with an outline of the rest of the thesis.

Framing this Project

My Own Subjectivity

In studying white gay men, I struggle with whether or not I should be referring to them 'them' or to 'us.' My motivation for undertaking this project is neither altruistic nor 'objectively' scientific. Throughout the process of constructing this research and interviewing my participants, I continually struggled to understand my own relationships with racism, sexism, heterosexism, power, privilege, and oppression. Through this work, I am not only hoping to better understand white gay men as an identity group and as a community, but also, to better understand my relationship to systemic domination, collective liberation, and my own humanity (Bérubé, 2001). As one of the participants pointed out, no matter how critical we are of white gay men, this *is* our

identity and oftentimes our community, and we have to acknowledge and use our position within communities of white gay men to encourage critical conversations and action. Moreover, as a gay man, I have struggled with the culture of and my own desire to harshly criticize these men (Pruitt, 2012) and by extension, those aspects of myself I see in them. I continually struggle to strike a balance between holding us accountable to recognize and take responsibility for our privilege, and to practice compassion and self-care by acknowledging the extent of our own marginalization and the possibility for us to work to unlearn and act against the systems that privilege us.

Intersectional Framework

Intersectionality has been used as a frame to investigate the ways in which forms of oppression are not only interrelated but indeed, interdependent (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). This perspective reveals that racism, sexism, and heterosexism (not to mention other forms of oppression, including capitalism/classism, genderism, and ableism) interact with each other and belie similarities, and are also mutually dependent, insofar as racism cannot exist as it does without sexism, and in turn without heterosexism, etc. Canonical theories of intersectionality have described the multiple forms of discrimination that serve to doubly, triply, and so on, disadvantage individuals and groups that hold multiple subordinate identities (Combahee River Collective, 1981; Lorde, 1984; McCall, 2005). The work of those living at the intersections of multiple marginalizations has been successful in incorporating this understanding and framework into many spheres of feminist scholarship and activism (Davis, 2009).

Recent years have seen a growth in academic literature on engaging intersectionality in empirical research studies (Bowleg, 2009; Cole, 2009; McCall, 2005; Simien, 2007; Warner, 2008). This growing body of literature documents the difficulties in incorporating

intersectionality into existing and accepted research methods as well as the promise of new forms of understanding and knowledge production coming out of the increased use of intersectionality in scholarly work. McCall (2005) describes three types of approaches to intersectionality research, two of which are used herein. *Inter*-categorical analyses temporarily accept the existence of social categories and use those categories as a means for documenting inequalities and disparities. *Intra*-categorical analyses also accept the existence of categories, but interrogate the boundaries of these categories by examining a group at a specified set of intersections, revealing the “complexity of lived experience within such groups” (McCall, 2005, p. 1774) – in this case, white gay men. In focusing on white gay men, I provisionally accept white, gay, and man as categories, and attempt to both document aspects of this community, including diversity within, as well as strategically pursuing the questions of how inequality, power, and domination affect white gay men vis-à-vis race, gender, and sexual orientation (Cole, 2009; McCall, 2005). This strategy allows me to address the processes of racialization, gendering, and sexualization of white gay men rather than focusing on identity categories (Choo & Feree, 2010) and an additive approach to understanding multiple identities.

Gay Identity and Anti-Heterosexist Politics

Sexual Minority Identity Development

Many models of sexual identity development work under the assumption of a linear model wherein the end result is a ‘healthy’ well-adjusted model of sexual behavior and identity integration (e.g., Cass, 1979). Although these models can be helpful and have been empirically tested through the experiences of young people, they also have the potential of overlooking and thereby erasing the realities of the ongoing stress of living in a heterosexist society (Kimmel & Mahalik, 2005; Meyer, 2003; Woodford, Howell, Silverschanz, & Yu, 2012), as well as the

question of whether or not lesbian, gay, bisexual, and similarly identified people live in other systems of racial, gender, and/or economic domination that complicate the process of developing a ‘well-adjusted,’ resolved, and integrated identity (Bing, 2004; Ryan, 2003).

In particular, models of sexual minority identity development have prioritized the process of self-disclosure in developing a healthy LGB identity (Rosario, Scrimshaw, & Hunter, 2004). Although disclosure can be an important milestone for individuals in accepting themselves, it also carries racial implications. Coming out represents coming into a new identity and a new community. However, racism in predominantly white LGB communities poses significant challenges for LGB people of Color (Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011; Nabors, Hall, Miville, Nettles, Pauling, & Ragsdale, 2001). Moreover, gay identity is historically and culturally rooted in one’s ability to leave their community of origin for a more accepting area, carrying an underlying assumption of economic and social mobility (d’Emilio, 1983). The process of coming out, and the resulting coming ‘in’ to a new community should be understood in its racial, gender, and social contexts.

In a longitudinal study of LGB youth, Rosario and colleagues (2004) documented the process of coming to self-acceptance along the lines of race. While respondents of Color started out with lower rates of self-acceptance than white respondents, the increase over time was greater, suggesting a greater struggle for self-acceptance. The relative lack of struggle of white LGB youth compared to LGB youth of Color represents the privilege of having access to dominant construction of gay identity and potentially the privilege to navigate resources and accepting communities. However, this privilege might also prevent white LGB youth from critically examining their identities, propelling a propensity to reach ‘integrated’ identity through

normalizing it (Rosario et al., 2004) in comparison to prevailing dominant norms of society (Cohen, 1997; Duggan, 2004).

Critical Youth Theory and Minimization

Critical youth theory argues that marginalized young people respond to their marginalization in three relatively distinct ways: (1) self-destructive behaviors, (2) individual achievement, and (3) transformative resistance (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). Critical youth theory centers on the agency of marginalized youth, arguing, for instance, that self-destructive behaviors like dropping out of school are a means to avoid the structures that marginalize them (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Wernick, Woodford, & Siden, 2010). In contrast, individual achievement describes youth who concentrate on their own achievement as a distraction from their marginalization (e.g., by devoting themselves to their studies), or as a way to obtain social and economic mobility to leave a hostile environment (Cammarota & Fine, 2008).

Transformative resistance, in contrast with both self-destructive and individual achievement focuses on changing rather than reacting to marginal structures. Transformational resistance focuses on education, empowerment, and community building among young people to effect change in the systems that affect their lives (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Wernick et al., 2010). Engaging in transformational resistance requires not only critical thinking skills, but structures that can scaffold youth's development and encourage critical consciousness development, praxis, and community building (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Wernick et al., 2010).

Fine (2011) conducted a qualitative analysis of the experiences of out lesbian, gay, and bisexual people on a college campus. In the face of heterosexism, participants sought to minimize experiences of marginalization and construct an identity that was separate from their

identity as a sexual minority. This trend of minimization suggests that *some* contemporary sexual minority college students might find themselves attempting to avoid heterosexism as part of their lives rather than addressing it. In light of critical youth theory, minimization should be understood as a manifestation of youth's agency, and could be considered a form of self-achievement resistance. However, in considering white gay men in particular, minimization must also be seen in the context of white and male privilege. Halberstam (2005) argues that when white gay men attempt to erase and rid themselves of the shame of being sexually marginal, it can result in the displacement of this shame onto bodies of Color. White gay men who seek to minimize and escape their shame can fall back on their power and privilege as white men to view other bodies as objects (particularly, women/POC⁴) for their anxieties (Halberstam, 2005).

Gay/Lesbian and LGBTQ Politics

Although the Stonewall riots are sometimes (problematically) marked as the beginning of the modern 'gay rights' movement, drag queens of Color dancing in defiance to police brutality is starkly different from wealthy white men in business suits brokering deals with conservatives to legalize 'gay marriage' (Nagourney & Barnes, 2012; Olson, 2010; Rivera, 2007). Historically, queer liberation movements have focused on renegotiating the terms of existing institutions and on building coalitions across issues like class, sex/gender identity, and race (Applied Research Center, 2010; Cohen, 1997; Cohen, 2005; King, 2012; Liu & Sen, 2012); however, these movements often occupy a marginal role in comparison to the equality movements, particularly in terms of resources, public support, and media recognition (Farrow, 2011). By contrast, the contemporary gay and lesbian equality movements have focused on inclusion in existing institutions, and moreover, have focused on relatively conservative goals like marriage, military

⁴ I use women/POC throughout as an attempt to refer to women of all racial identities and POC of all gender identities (including women of Color who might be implicitly left out by the verbiage 'women and POC')

service, and hate crimes legislation (Farrow, 2011; Olson, 2010; Stein, 2002; Warner, 1999). As the United States and other Western nations dominate the global political economy (Held, 1991; Walkerdine & Bansel, 2010), claims for gay citizenship depend not only on gays and lesbian's ability to fit in as 'good citizens' of the United States, but also to actively support the domination of the United States in the global political economy (Becker, 2002; Duggan, 2004; Connell, 2005; Puar, 2006; Stein, 2002).

In order to resist *within* systems, it has been necessary for mainstream movements to pursue their goals by changing and responding to the public opinion of the majority – i.e., straight people (Chauncey, 2004). The most infamous example of these strategies is seen in the maneuvering of major gay rights organizations in supporting the Employment Non-Discrimination Act proposed in 2007 that did not include gender identity (National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce, 2012). More recently, during a rally outside of the Supreme Court of the United States regarding hearings on California's Proposition 8 and one section of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), organizers of the rally silenced undocumented and trans* activists (Bennett-Smith, 2013). These strategic moves by the rich, mainstream gay and lesbian organizations represent the means by which political advances for some members of LGBTQ communities (typically, those which are most in line with heterosexual institutions and will benefit those who already have the most relative privilege) are sought at the expense of representation of the interests of *all* members of LGBTQ communities (Chauncey, 2004; Cohen, 1997; Duggan, 2004; Farrow, 2011).

Homonormativity has been used to describe the ways in which identity- and issue-based politics of 'gay rights' has transitioned from being part of constituency-based, progressive, and Leftist coalitions and movements into contesting the exclusion of gays and lesbians in the

neoliberal, corporate framework (Duggan, 2004), reinforcing dominant (and oppressive) narratives around gender, race, class, and nation (Puar, 2006). As coined by Lisa Duggan (2004), homonormativity is “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency in a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (p. 50). This strategy has emerged particularly following the declaration of the War on Terror and the resulting emergence of images of a terrorist other from whom homonormative political groups have distanced themselves in contrast to in order to define gays and lesbians as ‘good’ citizens (Becker, 2002; Duggan, 2004; Puar, 2006). When Duggan coined “homonormativity” in 2004, she described those advocating it as “a relatively small, emergent minority – but a highly visible new formation within neoliberal politics” (p. 44). However, in the intervening years since *Twilight of Equality?*, the coalition of groups embracing flaccid multicultural and diversity rhetoric has only grown larger and stronger.

While the goals of mainstream movements arise from a desire to create a better life for lesbian and gay (and sometimes bisexual and trans*) people, the use of these tactics recreate a continued investment in the centrality of white, patriarchal, middle class culture (Bérubé, 2001) and strengthen neoliberalism (Duggan, 2004). The critiques of homonormative politics have focused on organizations and movements (Duggan, 2004), as well as engaged activists and academics (Bérubé, 2001); however, the ongoing use of and increased domination of homonormative tactics also begs a question about the impacts of the changing political environment on the white gay men whose apparent interests and identities are being included in these movements, but might or might not be actively participating in movements and organizations themselves.

Whiteness

The characterization of whiteness and the study of white supremacy, white privilege, and whites' roles in racism and racial justice are contentious and problematic. While people of Color are often compelled to rapidly develop an intimate understanding of whiteness in order to survive in a white supremacist culture (Lugones & Spelman, 1983), recent developments – especially the writings of people of Color – have provided new ground within the scholarly canon from which to analyze and contribute to white people's understanding of whiteness (Gordon, 2004; Rasmussen, Klinenberg, Nexcia, & Wray, 2001). This new study of whiteness prioritizes an understanding of the way that white people are racialized, the impacts that racism has on oppressing people and communities of Color, and the over-advantaging of white people (Pease, 2010; Wise, 2010). However, this study of whiteness should only be seen as a companion to, and not a replacement of, listening to and raising the voices of people of Color (Pease, 2010).

White Supremacy as a System

Since the arrival of white people in North America, racism has been a pervasive force in establishing social, political and economic domination over non-white people in the region that is now the United States. The forms and frames of this domination and even the composition of ethnic groups that qualify as white in the United States have evolved over time (Alba, 1992), but that does not negate the accumulative impact that white supremacy has had (Gordon, 2004; Katznelson, 2006). The impact of this accumulation can be seen in how while income levels between racial groups have changed, differentials of wealth continue to reflect racism of the past and of today (Keister, 2000; Yeung & Conley, 2008). For instance, in 2012, the wealth gap between whites and Blacks had nearly doubled since the onset of the Great Recession, with whites having a median net worth of over \$100,000, whereas median net worth for Blacks was

just under \$5,000 (Luhby, 2012). This monetary accumulation of privilege in the form of wealth is relatively easy to quantify and therefore mark, but similar processes have been important in the prevailing domination of white people in political, cultural, and social spheres. White supremacy consolidates advantages among white and perpetuates the marginalization of people of Color on all levels (Gordon, 2004).

White privilege, i.e., the benefits that whites received from racism, is a crucial tool in maintaining white supremacy. However, that is not to say that all white people experience the same forms of white privilege (Gordon, 2004). Intersections of gender, class, sexual orientation, citizenship, and (dis)ability status are all salient factors in shaping the manifestations of white supremacy in the lives of individuals and communities (Chambers, 1997; Harris, 2003). There are large numbers of white people who benefit from and participate in white privilege who hold relatively little political, social, and economic power within U.S. society as a whole (Harris, 2003). These people, however, still benefit from white privilege, even if just in their relative domination of people of Color within similar social strata, not to mention the cultural and psychic benefits of identifying with privilege (Harris, 2003; Lipsitz, 2010).

Locating white supremacy as a system should not be used to alleviate the responsibility of racism off of individuals and communities. White supremacy is maintained by individual and institutional choices to maintain and consolidate power in white communities (Gordon, 2004). As modern racism, sexism, and homophobia gain more recognition in the academy and salience in society, issues of intent become hard to decipher (Liu & Mills, 2006; Wise, 2010). White people can maintain their privilege without any conscious racially based intent (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1981), but white supremacy cannot be maintained without continued choices by

individuals and institutions to maintain white privilege (Gordon, 2004), even if those decisions are removed of their racial signifiers.

Whiteness as Invisible, Normative

Although ‘colorblind’ and ‘post-racial’ have recently grown in prominence as buzzwords in the ways that people talk about the status of communities of Color, they have important histories in the ways that U.S. society conceptualizes whiteness. The fallacy of a post-racial United States has gained traction in popular consciousness following the 2008 election of President Barack Obama. Critiques of this perspective have pointed to how belief in and advocating for a colorblind approach serves to erase rather than undermine the realities of racism and racial disparities (Wise, 2010). Similarly, but far less explored, the ‘unmarked’ nature of whiteness as invisible to white people is a key tool in the maintenance of white supremacy (Rasmussen et al., 2001). For scholars of whiteness who have a commitment to anti-racism, identifying whiteness as *something* that can be discussed, understood, and unraveled is key to dismantling white supremacy (Pease, 2010; Suchet, 2007). Particularly among anti-racist whites, the focus on how racism disadvantages people and communities of Color without also noting the ways that white supremacy *over*-advantages whites serves to apply a similar lens of colorblindness to white people (Cole, 2012; Harris, 2003), limiting the capacity for whites to see themselves in the anti-racist project (Edwards, 2006).

The invisibility of whiteness facilitates the process of maintaining the dominance of white supremacy in U.S. society and in the world. White supremacy affords white people disproportionate access to *unearned entitlements*, i.e., those things that in a just society would be equitably afforded to all people (McIntosh, 1990). For instance, being able to live without fear of discrimination on the basis of race in access to housing is an example of an *unearned entitlement*

of white privilege. White people are also afforded *unearned advantages*, i.e., privileges that sustain the dominance of whites (McIntosh, 1990). For example, legacy policies at elite universities disproportionately benefit white people whose family members have attended these schools. Within the system of white supremacy, as white people are given disproportionate access to *unearned entitlements*, they become *unearned advantages* in and of themselves (McIntosh, 1990). Through the invisibility of whiteness, access to the privilege of unearned advantages collapses the definition of a ‘normal’ or ideal subject into the white body, while removing the social location of that subject (Gordon, 2004). That is, because whiteness is often unmarked by racial signifiers in dominant settings, the unearned advantages and unearned entitlements of whites become infused into understandings of what it means to be human. In turn, white people implicitly and explicitly become the reference group against which all other communities are judged, creating and sustaining the *normativity* of whiteness (Gordon, 2004).

Whiteness as Identity

White privilege accumulates within individual white people as an identity through a continual process of racial socialization in a white supremacist system (Harro, 1996). Individuals in the United States learn about race at a remarkably young age, and are able to articulate explicit racial bias as early as three years old (Feagin, 2010). This learning happens before complex categories and dynamics are comprehensible, and are based mostly off of social and observational learning (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Jones & Carter, 1996; Feagin, 2010). As white people grow up in the United States, they are often overtly taught ‘equality,’ while implicitly taught racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Further learning either builds and supports these understandings or challenges them (Harro, 1996). Because of the white supremacist nature of

U.S. culture, racial socialization often continually defines white people and white culture as superior to all others (Harro, 1996; Pease, 2010).⁵

White people often rely on the invisibility of whiteness to avoid talking about how they have benefited from white supremacy (Bush, 2004). Denying the impact of whiteness on one's identity and successes or failures is a way of avoiding the responsibility to understand one's own position in society as not entirely self-earned (Bush, 2004; Lipsitz, 2010). That is, white people are able to and often compelled to define their lives in terms of personal choices instead of racial privilege. In this way, a central aspect of whiteness is an individualistic overvaluation of one's self-worth. Lipsitz (2010) describes this phenomenon as the possessive investment in whiteness. The continued possessive investment in whiteness by white people relies on avoiding the impacts race has on white people, which is supported by formations of modern racism that provides racially de-signified ways to talk about race (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1981). Halberstam (2005) argues that white gay men, in particular, recreate and reaffirm oppressive discourses around race and gender in while falling back on their marginalized identity status to avoid the responsibility of handling their privilege.

Costs of White Supremacy to White People

White supremacy also creates significant costs for white people as a result of the structures that over-empower them, although these costs are, frankly, negligible in comparison to the violence committed on bodies and communities of Color. However, in studying whiteness, illuminating these costs can serve as a motivation for white people to act against their own privilege (Edwards, 2006; Lipsitz, 2004; Wise, 2010). These costs come at three levels: material, moral, and psychological (Feagin & Vera, 1995). A prime example of the material costs of

⁵ It has been suggested that the cultural and racial domination of white people is a continuation of Western Colonialism, based in and continuing to reinforce the global hegemonic power of the white West.

whiteness is the investment of federal and state dollars into the prison industrial complex. The state spends exorbitant amounts of money to imprison mostly Black and Brown people, while rates of incarceration have no observable impact on crime and have a negative impact on public safety as a whole (Petteruti & Walsh, 2008; Schiraldi & Ziedenberg, 2003). Moral and psychological costs for white people are also high (Feagin & Vera, 1995). White people who believe in fairness, equality (or even equity), and compassion are limited in their ability to express these values in relation to people of Color (Harro, 1996). White people can also feel limited in their ability to openly communicate with other white people about race (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; McKinney, 2005; Myers, 2003).

Masculinity

Masculinity⁶ is an integral part of systems of sex, gender, and desire (Pease, 2010; Rubin, 1984), and masculinity studies have developed the understanding of the role of privilege in maintaining sexism (Harris & Edwards, 2010; Kimmel, 2000). In dominant cultural discourses and essentialist arguments about gender, masculinity arises from biological characteristics of male bodies. By contrast, social scientists often take a view of masculinity as the gendered (and constructed) aspects of men's lives. This perspective is helpful (Connell, 2005) but incomplete as masculinity is also inscribed on the bodies of some women (e.g., lesbians) and appropriated by women (Calhoun, 1994; Halberstam, 1998). Connell (2005) alternatively conceptualizes masculinity as a complex web of symbols, wherein "one symbol can only be understood within a connected system of symbols... no masculinity arises except in a system of gender relations" (Connell, 2005, p. 71). These symbols exist in relationships with bodies, communities,

⁶ In embracing the intracategorical and intercategorical approaches to intersectionality (McCall, 2005), I temporarily accept the man/woman binary in defining gendered relationships. The focus of this project is on the sexism in men's lives, i.e., the oppression of women. While sexism intersects with genderism, genderism is a distinct system that oppresses trans* people (Hill & Willoughby, 2005), which is, regrettably, outside of the scope of this project.

institutions, and discourses. Within these relationships, masculinity is often most saliently located in the relationships themselves, where gender is performed (Butler, 1990; Pease, 2010). As masculinity is repeated, it appears both natural and essential to male bodies, as individuals and communities sometimes experience a cultural amnesia about the multigenerational changes, fluidity, and formations of masculinity (Kimmel, 1997).

Hegemonic and Dominant Masculinities

Hegemonic masculinity is “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell, 2005, p.77). The meanings of hegemonic masculinity can transform to embody different symbols and practices over time (Connell, 2005; Kimmel, 1997); behaviors and symbols have no connection to masculinity and femininity without a relationship to power. As men, white gay men have a self-interest in the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity, as “structurally, men as an interest group are inclined to support hegemonic masculinity as a means to defend patriarchy and their dominant position over women” (Coles, 2009, p. 31). Hegemonic masculinity serves to consolidate the power of men, subvert claims to power by women, and deny claims to legitimacy based on femininity (Connell, 2005; Coles, 2009; Pease, 2010).

Hegemonic masculinity is also imbued with interactions between systems of sex/gender/desire and other systems of domination. Hegemonic masculinity is only fully available to bodies that exist in other sites of privilege. Being white, wealthy, able-bodied, heterosexual, and a U.S. citizen all increase one’s access to hegemonic masculinity. However, that is not to say that masculinity is not used by other men or by women. Coles (2009) describes *dominant masculinity* as the manifestation of an appropriated hegemonic masculinity among

marginalized groups of men. As forms of masculinity, dominant masculinities serve to maintain and reinforce male/masculine power, but they also are continually held in a marginal context to hegemonic masculinity. For example, heterosexual conquest by men is a tool of hegemonic masculinity. Gay men might incorporate (gay) sexual domination into a dominant form of masculinity, using it as a tool to create social power relationships between men while also maintaining their marginality compared to straight men based on the fact that they're having sex with men. However, no empirical studies have examined the masculinity of white gay men as a form of dominant masculinity.

In contrast with hegemonic and dominant masculinities are subordinated masculinities and femininity (Cheng, 1999; Coles, 2009). Subordinated masculinities are the sets of behaviors and beliefs that serve as a foil to hegemonic masculinity. Because hegemonic masculinity is a diffuse category that most men do not fit and certainly, no men fit all of the time, the realities of men's lives that fall outside of their consolidation of power become part of subordinated masculinities (Harris & Edwards, 2010). Masculinity studies often use subordinated masculinities to describe the diversity of men's experiences. However, one major pitfall of this characterization is that it stabilizes the gender binary. If all of men's lives are sorted into different forms of masculinity, it limits the potential for men to expand into and engage with femininity as part of their selves (Wilson et al., 2010).

Personal Costs of Masculinity

While masculinity in general – and hegemonic masculinity in particular – affords social privilege and power to men, there are two main costs for men.⁷ The first cost is the loss of an authentic self (Harris & Edwards, 2010). Because hegemonic masculinity compels men to

⁷ As with the costs of white privilege, these 'costs' are negligible compared to the violence sexism creates on the bodies of women.

engage certain behaviors, it limits their ability to engage with a free range of expression.

However, this loss of self is tricky territory. I hesitate to assume that some authentic self exists ‘underneath’ social constructions, but I instead maintain that the self is determined by relationships between autonomy, choice, individuals, communities, institutions, and society. The cost, then, is in limiting the ability of men to freely negotiate which influences can be salient. For example, hegemonic masculinity often compels stoicism among men, suppressing the emotions that are sanctioned as unfit for male bodies. However, that is not a denial of universal human emotions, but rather, a social policing that limits the possibility for the exploration of emotions.

The other main cost of masculinity for men is in the loss of humanity that arises from holding the role as the oppressor (Pease, 2010). When engaging masculine symbols, men either by conscious choice or in the repetition of roles that feel natural assert themselves as dominant, which often results in men not being able to truly listen to women, talking most directly to other men, losing out on the perspectives of women, and having difficulty forming meaningful relationships with women and other men (McIntosh, 1990).

Men can often articulate the costs and downfalls of hegemonic masculinity but feel trapped, scared, and ashamed when it comes to actually challenging or changing masculine practices (Pease, 2010; Harris & Edwards, 2010). Part of this experience is built on the collective experience of inadequacy among men (Kimmel, 2000). Men are trained to feel inadequate, and in turn, focus on overcoming that inadequacy, rather than attempting to contest the terms of success from which they feel inadequate. This inadequacy is often policed by other men. As Kimmel (2000) argues, masculinity is something that is given to men by men, as a way of validating and affirming their manhood. However, these same men that are granting the privileges of masculinity to each other are also caught in the bargain of masculinity themselves,

and experience isolation, shame, silence, and inadequacy. Moreover, those men who experience the disadvantages of masculinity most acutely might, indeed, be the ones who also benefit the least from its privileges (Connell, 2005; Pease, 2010).

Masculinity and Homophobia

Homophobia plays a crucial role in constructing hegemonic and dominant masculinities (Kimmel, 2000; Pascoe, 2005), creating a complex tension for gay men. The derision of all men through the use of homophobic slurs and accusations of same-sex attraction is a mechanism through which masculinity is reaffirmed (Cheng, 1999; Kimmel, 2000; Pascoe, 2005). This pattern carries the symbolic meaning that masculinity and same-sex sexuality and/or gay identity are inherently at odds. It has been argued that gay (and bisexual, and other similarly identified) men by virtue of their exclusion from masculinity cannot embody any dominant form of masculinity (Edwards & Jones, 2009). This perspective represents an opportunity for gay men to challenge and transcend gender norms in new ways that incorporate both masculinity and femininity (Wilson et al., 2010). However, it might also undermine the masculine privilege that gay men hold, and the ways that masculinity is reinforced among gay men.

Many men in the United States and in the world live at the intersection of systems that advantage them with male/masculine privilege and simultaneously disadvantage them and exclude them based on their other identities (Connell, 2005; Pease, 2010). One result of this tension can be overcompensation of and investment in masculinity to reclaim a sense of power and control (Harris & Edwards, 2010). For example, Black men in mainstream hip-hop are often known for their misogyny and homophobia, which is sometimes viewed as a result of ‘traditional’ social values in communities of Color, especially Black and Latino/Hispanic communities (Harris, 2009; Herek & Gonzalez-Rivera, 2006), but it can also be seen as a way

for Black men to reassert their dominance as men, in spite of their exclusion from hegemonic masculinity by virtue of their race (Niesel, 1997).

White Men's Identity as White Men

White men, as white men, are offered critical bargains in defining their identities. Both as men, and as white people, they are offered social privileges (and usually, compelled to accept these privileges), but with personal costs (Feagin & Vera, 1995; Harris & Edwards, 2010). These social privileges result in greater material advantages, domination over women/POC, and an overinflated sense of self-worth and accomplishment (Lipsitz, 2010; McIntosh, 1990). At the same time, these privileges come at the cost of compelling white men to take on the role of oppressor, stripping them of their humanity, decreasing their capacity for empathy, and encouraging silence, stoicism, and judgment (Harris & Edwards, 2010) – both as gendered and raced subjects. The simultaneous existence of these identities has a compounding impact, wherein white men are invested in both patriarchy and white supremacy at the same time, and these investments feed off and encourage each other (Abreu, Goodyear, Campos, & Newcomb, 2000).

Within the mutually reinforcing relationship between gender and race, Wilson and colleagues (2010) define two simultaneous processes: culturalizing (or racializing) gender and gendering race/ethnicity. Culturalizing gender involves the processes by which gender is lived through a specific set of race-specific expectations. For example, playing golf is a race (white) and class (wealthy) specific manifestation of masculinity. On the other hand, gendering race and ethnicity is the process by which individuals learn race through a lens of gender-specific expectations. In their study, they discussed how Black men learned about stereotypes of Black people as criminals through a man-specific lens (Wilson et al., 2010). For white men, an example

of a similar process might be learning to be white as learning to be competitive and dominant in educational settings, in which the competitive nature is particularly gendered.

Within the context of being socialized as white men, white gay men also engage their development as gay. Lippa and Tan (2001) investigated ethnic belonging and gender expression across sexual orientation lines among Asian, Hispanic, and white men. Among these three groups, white men had the smallest difference in gender expression between gay and straight men. As white men, white gay men are still strongly socialized into systems of masculinity that is also inevitably tied into their identities as white.

Conclusion

In reviewing each area of literature, and the intersections of these identities, it becomes clear that racism, sexism, and heterosexism play mutually reinforcing, but sometimes contradictory roles in over-empowering, situating, and oppressing white gay men. In recognizing white gay men as privileged by their identities as white men, I seek to understand how these privileges impact their marginalization, both in terms of their experiences of heterosexism and the ways that they respond to heterosexism. However, also recognizing these participants as marginalized by heterosexism, I also investigate the impacts of this marginalization on their participation in and resistance to systems of racism and sexism. Although separating out these processes is inherently problematic, as they are all mutually constituted, it is also a useful strategy in drawing out particular dynamics of intersectionality (Wilson et al., 2010). Moreover, given the political and social context, I seek to analyze the dynamics of oppression along lines of race, gender, and sexual orientation through a lens of critically understanding the influences of homonormativity in the lives of these men.

In the next chapter, I outline the methodology used to collect and analyze data for the current project. Following, I report and discuss five major sets of themes that emerged in the pursuit of the research questions. In particular, I turn first to how participants' privilege as white men affects their experiences as gay, and then to participants' white and male identities in the context of their marginalization as gay. I then report novel findings from two interviewees that constitute major areas of consideration of intersectionality in the lives of white gay men outside of the main research focus. I conclude by offering a synthesis of these findings and their implications, as well as my own reflections on both the process of and outcomes of this project.

Chapter 2: Methods

In order to investigate the intersecting roles of marginalization and privilege in the lives of white gay men and their relationships with racism, sexism, and heterosexism, I recruited white gay men who are current and recent University of Michigan students between the ages of 18 to 25 to participate in semi-structured interviews. In this chapter, I first describe the sample of white gay men interviewed for the present study; I turn next to the interviews themselves; and then, to the use of a feminist reading of an interpretative phenomenological analysis framework to analyze interview data; finally, I conclude with a reflection on my own relationship to the methodology of the present study.

Sample

Recruitment

Recruitment materials solicited participants who identified as white gay men between the ages of 18 and 25 and were current or recent University of Michigan students to participate in a research study about identity, intersectionality, race, sexuality, and gender. Participants were recruited by sending emails to student organizations, student leaders, and student affairs program listservs. These emails targeted officially designated LGBTQ spaces, including the Spectrum Center – the University office devoted to addressing LGBTQ affairs – and large LGBTQ organizations as well as issue- and school/college-specific LGBTQ organizations. Leaders of these organizations were encouraged to send the recruitment message to their members and to pass along the email to anyone else they thought might be interested. Emails were also sent to social justice education programs and other social-justice related organizations as well as to other large political and service-based student organizations. Recruitment flyers were also posted in public spaces, including student unions and the Spectrum Center. Emails and posters included

the opportunity to receive a \$5 gift card to one of two local coffee shops for participating and an email address created for the study to contact about scheduling an interview. The recruitment materials are included in the Appendix. The study received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the University of Michigan.

Participants

All participants identified as white gay men between the ages of 18 and 25 ($n = 15$). One participant also identified as queer, and one discussed that although he identifies as white, he is often mistakenly perceived to be a person of Color. No other participants identified a different racial, gender, or sexual identity. For a full description of the sample, see Table 1. Participants included undergraduates at each grade level (freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior) and recent graduates. The sample also included a mix of in-state ($n = 10$) and out-of-state students ($n = 5$). I was hesitant about the potential of over-sampling participants who were involved with ‘official’ LGBTQ spaces, because they might have been the most readily available to be interviewed and willing to participate; however, participants indicated a mix of experiences with these spaces, including being heavily involved in LGBTQ spaces on campus (i.e., working for the Spectrum Center and/or taking on a leadership positions in an LGBTQ organization) to not being involved at all (see Table 1 for a full breakdown).

Social class and/or socio-economic status were not explicitly asked about, as the intersection of class regrettably falls outside of the scope of the current project. Moreover, explicit demographic questions were not asked in order to protect the confidentiality of interview participants, particularly given the risk for being identified among the already strictly defined community of white gay men. However, based on the experiences shared by participants, they included a range of socio-economic backgrounds and experiences. There were certainly more

men from middle- and upper-class backgrounds than in the United States at large, but that is likely due to the make-up of the University of Michigan student body. Given the population studied, the range of experiences among the participants indicates the relative breadth of the sample.

Table 1: Description of Sample by Reported Demographics (n = 15)

	<i>n</i>	%
Year in School		
Freshman	1	6.7%
Sophomore	2	13.3%
Junior	2	13.3%
Senior	5	33.3%
Recent graduate	5	33.3%
Hometown		
In-state	10	66.7%
Out-of-state	5	33.3%
Involvement in LGBTQ Spaces		
None	5	33.3%
Minor	4	26.7%
Moderate	4	26.7%
Major	2	13.3%

Notes. Hometown refers to their description of their community of origin, not their official residency status. LGBTQ = lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer

Procedure

All but two interviews were conducted in-person in a private interview room. One interview was conducted over the phone, and one was conducted using Skype. Both of these interviews were conducted with recent graduates of the University of Michigan living on the east coast. Participants were each given an informed consent form (included in the Appendix) and the opportunity to review the document and give their consent to participate and to have their

interview audio recorded.⁸ They were also provided with a list of resources should they feel they need support following the interview and the opportunity to have the results of the study communicated to them following the completion of this manuscript.

During each interview, the respondent was given an overview of the purpose and aims of the study and provided with his honorarium.⁹ Participants were given the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms or have one assigned to them. The participants who were recent graduates were asked to focus on their experiences on campus and to use post-graduate experiences as a point of comparison for these experiences. The interview protocol followed a semi-structured format (see Appendix for full protocol) and covered four major areas: participants' understanding of and relationship with gay/LGBTQ movements, experiences of marginalization and support around gay identity, understandings of whiteness, and socialization around and relationships across gender. During each of the three sections on participants' identities, questions addressing intersectionality were posed following questions about identities in general (e.g., participants were asked about how their identity as white has affected them as gay men after gay identity and whiteness had already been discussed). In addition to the questions included in the protocol, probing and follow-up questions delved more deeply into their experiences based on their responses.

Data Analysis

The data analysis plan was guided by an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach. This methodology was chosen because of its ability to capture the complexity of each interview on its own terms, allowing me to draw out relationships between aspects of participants' experiences, in addition to being able to draw comparisons between respondents

⁸ Only one interview was not audio recorded. Extensive notes were taken throughout and after the interview to capture the participant's responses.

⁹ Three participants declined to receive an honorarium.

and therefore develop themes among respondents as a group (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA also allows researchers to capture “what happens when the everyday flow of lived experience takes on a particular significance for people,” as well as “exploring experience in its own terms” (Smith et al., 2009, p.1). This focus on everyday experiences and building on participants’ own words allowed for an analysis of the data that brings to light potentially mundane and hidden aspects of participants’ relationships to their identities and social structures, which might be particularly useful in investigating their relationships to power and privilege, given the ways these structures are often made invisible (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1981). The focus on honoring participants in their own words was also chosen because of its potential as a feminist methodology. In particular, in understanding the participants’ relationship to their own marginalization, it was particularly important to honor and represent their experiences to elevate their voices as marginalized subjects (hooks, 1991-1992). However, because the present study also handles participants’ power and privilege, and because of my own privileged subjectivity as a white man, particular critical attention was paid to contextualizing their experiences, particularly around race and gender, in their social and political contexts (Warner, 2008).

Following the IPA framework, analysis of the interview transcripts consisted of initial coding (line-by-line analysis, developing emerging themes, and investigating relationships within participants), and thematic coding for patterns and relationships across cases (Smith et al., 2009).

Initial Coding

Each transcript was read line-for-line, and descriptive and conceptual codes were developed. Descriptive codes focused on highlighting comments made by participants related to the research questions while staying close to their own understandings of the phenomena

experienced and using their own language. Conceptual codes drew emerging links between different aspects of participants' lived experiences and analyzed comments in the context of the research questions. Emerging codes were developed for each interview by reviewing the transcript as well as the descriptive and conceptual codes. Emerging codes were then sorted into the four areas of the research question. Codes that did not fit into the main categories of the research question were grouped together, and if they constituted a distinct category within themselves (e.g., gay identity and social class), they were sorted and written up as 'unique aspects.' If the codes did not fall into any of the four categories of the research question and were not substantive enough to be a stand-alone category, they were excluded. Memos were written for each section of codes to describe the meaning of each code, note any relevant or poignant examples, draw connections between the emerging themes, and note any contradictions between the codes. These memos captured the complexity and nuance of each participant's relationships to the research questions (Smith et al., 2009).

Thematic Coding

Following the development of initial codes for each of the interviews individually, themes were developed by consolidating the codes from all fifteen interviews together. Each set of codes and memos for each of the four areas (experiencing and resisting heterosexism in the context of white male privilege, and recreating and resisting racism and sexism through marginalization as gay) were grouped together. Codes that captured the same meaning were collapsed into a single theme, while codes that captured similar concepts were grouped together and developed into new a new theme that included multiple codes. Codes that represented an individual experience that did not relate to the experiences or perspectives of other participants were excluded; however, contradictory codes on related topics were actively sought out and

included together. Codes were sorted within themes by both the content of codes and the implicit structures that their comments reflected, as well as by the impact of their experiences on systems of racism, sexism, and heterosexism (Warner, 2008). From these codes, important themes were counted within the cases to demonstrate the relative prevalence among the sample (Smith et al., 1999); however, these frequencies were interpreted with caution given that respondents were drawn from a convenience sample.

The final themes for the full sample are reported in Chapters 3 through 7. The unique aspects were also drawn out and analyzed, each on their own terms. None of the unique aspects were shared across multiple participants, so each was reported for individual participants in Chapter 8 (Smith et al., 1999).

Reflection on the Methods

The interview process itself compelled participants to construct and bound their identities in asking them to explain their experiences to me. Some participants had clearly considered many of these issues at length and confidently answered questions while others had to carefully consider each of the questions before responding. Most participants included a mix confidence and hesitation on different topics, as will be presented in subsequent chapters. However, it is important to note that I – an individual, who is visibly a white man – conducted each of the interviews. While one participant directly asked if I was gay (which I confirmed for him), it is reasonable to expect that many could have and did assume my sexuality based on the content of the study and my own presentation. Moreover, many of the participants and I knew each other or knew of each other prior to their interview, but none of the interviewees would be considered close friends at the time of the interview.

Our shared identities as white gay men also likely helped develop rapport and might have allowed participants to speak freely about their gay identity relatively limited fear of judgment or confusion, as well as not feeling as much pressure to police themselves around talking about race and gender. Moreover, my implicit understanding of their identities and experiences, as well as our shared knowledge of local gay communities provided me with the ability to explore certain questions more in-depth based on this theoretical sensitivity. However, because participants knew about the study I was conducting and the focus on race and gender within my study, it is also possible that they felt a *greater* need to police themselves. For instance, it is interesting to note that many participants were concerned about if they were answering my questions ‘smart enough.’ In these moments of self-consciousness, the reality that they were actively constructing their identities as they presented them to me in the context of this research study became clear.

Special care was taken, then, to withhold judgment during the interview process. Given the ways that masculinity and whiteness are often policed and bounded within in-group communities, it was important for me to remain open and empathetic to all responses. All interviewees were encouraged to answer all of the questions and all responses were affirmed regardless of my personal agreement or disagreement with their perspective. When questions were posed to me, I responded in the terms of their previous comments, and turned these questions into further questions for them. While there were certainly moments where I desired to ‘correct’ someone or educate them, I withheld these desire in order to allow them to speak freely from their own perspectives.

It is also interesting to note that many participants, usually after the interview was over, expressed gratitude for the opportunity to reflect. While I did not take an active role in directly challenging participants, the act of posing questions about race, gender, sexuality, and

intersectionality was an intervention in and of itself, allowing participants to critically and openly reflect on their identities and the world around them.

Chapter 3: White Male Privilege and Experiences of Heterosexism

It's weird, because I feel like there's this like, pre-college life, and then college life where, it almost doesn't feel- and I feel like I've had to have this conversation, like, am I oppressed because I'm gay in a college setting? (Nathan)

Participants' privilege as white men helped to open doors both in dominant-straight culture and within gay/LGBTQ spaces. Within dominant-straight culture, the mechanisms of white male privilege influenced their experiences of oppression by compelling participants to experience and cope with their marginalization in particular ways, including developing gay identity separate from their experience of marginalization and constructing campus as a *claimed* safe space. Participants' privilege also allowed them to gain and maintain access to gay/LGBTQ spaces and to construct their experiences in these spaces in terms of their own individuality and empowerment, demonstrating the process through which unearned entitlements became unearned advantages among white gay men in the context of LGBTQ communities.

White Male Privilege Granting Access to Safe and Accepting Spaces

Participants' privileges as white men allowed them greater access as white *gay* men within dominant-straight spaces. This privilege was gained through highly visible representations of white gay men, as well as by having access to social and cultural capital to navigate perceived accepting spaces.

Participants often pointed to the representation of white gay men in popular media, including news coverage, TV, and movies, as a driving force behind their ability to gain acceptance as an individual, particularly in dominant-straight communities and spaces. For instance, Benjamin described how access to representations of white gay men in popular media allowed him access to acceptance among others, including family members and strangers:

I'd say that it allows, well, one, there is a lot more representation of me in media, it's a lot more accepted, I would say, and just more of a popular icon, so that I think allows for

people to see more of me and be more tolerable of the collective identities that I represent. (Benjamin)

This visibility allowed participants to interact with others as an individual, due to seemingly positive representations of white gay men in the media. This access was often a process that participants openly identified and of which they were explicitly aware.

In addition, participants also described actively seeking out and engaging in spaces that they identified as “more” accepting of their gay identity, including self-described liberal, progressive, and accepting places. For instance, Timothy described that he will be able to navigate queer-friendly professional and personal spaces:

Most of the spaces I inhabit will be queer friendly... I feel like [the] safety of my job, like nothing is hampered by that, and I feel like that for me, (pause) I feel like I have- I feel like I'm set (Timothy)

Actively seeking out spaces that are accepting of one's identity is likely not unique to white gay men. Certainly, members of various marginalized groups use their agency to seek out and create accepting environments; however, participants' abilities to access these types of communities was often predicated on their specific position as white men, as well as typically on their middle- or upper-class privilege. Nathan explicitly described how having access to the cultural capital of middle-class, white, suburban interests allowed him to participate in progressive spaces:

Especially in the RC [Residential College] and co-ops,¹⁰ it's one of those things, where it's like explicitly they're both very open-minded, progressive, or whatever, but then the individual interests, and just the taste of the co-op scene and the RC scene, they're like very Indie, which I don't know, I feel like even and those interests, they seem to be mostly white ... like the people who got interested in the music they were interested in or the films that they were interested ... like, those cultures exist sort of in these suburban upper class environments, so if you don't have exposure to those environments, then you usually don't have exposure to those tastes. (Nathan)

¹⁰ The Residential College (RC) is a living/learning community within the University of Michigan that has a widespread reputation on campus for being liberal/progressive, and Nathan had earlier described the RC and co-ops as places where he felt accepted for his gay identity, at least relative to other spaces on campus.

While Nathan explicitly described how access to privilege provided the cultural capital necessary to navigate accepting environments, most participants demonstrated it implicitly. For instance, the most common example was attending the University of Michigan itself. While access to the University of Michigan and other progressive/liberal/accepting/tolerant places is certainly not exclusively limited to middle- and upper-class white men (notably, one participant described his experiences coming from a working class background, see Chapter 8), access to these types of places is certainly not equitably distributed, and participants' privilege as white men contributed to their ability to enter and thrive in these spaces that are accepting of their (white) gay (man) identity.

'Safe Accepting Places' as Claimed Spaces

While participants' white male privilege allowed them access to safe and accepting places, they also actively claimed these spaces as 'accepting.' On-campus experiences were frequently described as being places where they were able to experience minimal amounts of discrimination and were able to seek out resources and support. In this sense, their on-campus lives were in reality more accepting and tolerant than other environments that they lived in, for instance, in high school. However, in addition, the Ann Arbor and campus also became a *claimed* space. That is, participants' belief in the safety and acceptance on campus often masked reality of their own marginalization, both in their relationship to their own identity and experiences, as well as in their relationships to gay/LGBTQ communities in general.

Cole described his perspective on the campus community, one that was largely shared among participants:

The University of Michigan in my opinion is very open minded, and I don't feel like marginalized, I'd say (Cole)

Participants' both described the rhetoric of the University of Michigan as an "open minded" place, while also relating the perceived directly to their own experiences (or lack thereof) of marginalization. These claims created two dynamics: the first, that Ann Arbor is a safe place, and second, that they as individual did not *feel* marginalized, even when they experienced marginalization. While some participants pushed back against Ann Arbor as a 'safe space,' in general, most engaged in a process the pit their experiences of marginalization against the rhetoric of claimed space. For instance, Ryan described being shouted at while he was holding hands with another man:

There have been times when I was dating someone a while back, and um, we would, we were walking really late at night holding hands and we were shouted at. That happened like three times, and I was like, "This is Ann Arbor." (Ryan)

As Ryan described, experiences of discrimination became an anomaly within the claimed space of Ann Arbor, directly calling into question how safe Ann Arbor really is. Aaron described a similar process of feeling this tension:

I was walking down the street in the evening, with another man who identified as gay. I had my rainbow hat on and he had a purple sweatshirt on, and a man who was driving by started yelling a bunch of things at us, um, and the actual insults he yelled aren't, I don't think really encompassed the oppression that I felt, it was more the idea that, oh, I'm not safe on the street anymore if that one man felt comfortable yelling those things at me, how do I know that other people won't yell things at me, and you know yelling is only a start, if I knew that is was just going to be yelling, and that was where it ended, obviously I don't think that that's a good thing, but I think that I could take a deep breath and deal with, but knowing that that yelling can lead to physical violence or other forms of violence is really unsettling for me, especially because I have gay friends who have encountered either physical violence or threats of physical violence even in a place like Ann Arbor that's supposedly so gay-friendly, so it's the feeling of I'm not safe here, in a place that I consider home. (Aaron)

As Aaron described both hearing about the experiences of others and his own experience of anti-gay harassment called into question the safety of Ann Arbor. His comments suggest that white

gay men's interest in claiming safe spaces is in allowing them to feel and navigate these spaces as if they were accepting, regardless of the marginalization they experience. Notably, Aaron's ability to articulate the dissonance discrimination created with his own sense of safety depended on contextualizing his experience in a structural understanding of discrimination, seeing the connections between anti-gay language and anti-gay physical violence, as well as connecting his own experiences to those of others. This structural understanding represents knowledge of heterosexism as a system, therefore preventing him from maintaining this idea that anti-gay harassment is an anomalous occurrence in the context of a safe space. Participants who maintained the idea of campus as a safe space did so by consistently coding experiences of discrimination as exceptions to the rule through a process of minimization.

Minimization and White Male Privilege

Minimization has been described elsewhere as the process by which sexual minorities construct meaning of their experiences on campus as separate and distinct from their own marginalization (Fine, 2011). Participants used minimization as a coping mechanism in responding to their own experiences and feelings of marginalization, the forms of their marginalization. As well, the desire to minimize in the first place was contextualized in their privileged identities as white men.

The process of minimization was demonstrated in participants' descriptions of their experiences of marginalization and harassment. The minimization itself took a variety of forms, including explaining discrimination as being uncommon, as being 'not as bad' as other people's experiences, and by diminishing the impact of experiencing or witnessing harassment.

Participants who described direct forms of harassment, including physical violence, often

qualified their experience as being infrequent in their own lives (*trigger warning: physical violence*):

One instance recently, and that was walking, I dropped my friends off after Saturday night, um, and got them home safe, and walking ... um, there were a group of guys that kind of came at me with a couple of knives. That's been the one recent instance, thankfully nothing really happened, it was kind of a drunk wanna fight, trying to get someone to egg on to do that and so I was consequentially at the end of that, and part of it was taunting with "fag," "queer," "gay," etc. so, that's been one instance on campus, but that was fairly isolated. (Benjamin)

Benjamin's experience, which was clearly violent anti-gay harassment, was qualified as being "fairly isolated." Interestingly, Benjamin described this experience in the context of his dropping his friends off to get them home safe. While as white gay men, participants might support their women friends by walking them home, in asserting that they themselves can walk home alone they also minimize the reality that gay men are frequently harassed at night, and while the risk for sexual assault is not the same, the exposure to discrimination and violence is there. By qualifying this experience as "fairly isolated," Benjamin was able to see it in terms of being an exception to his overall positive experience on campus. Others described their own discrimination, but qualified it by saying that it wasn't as bad as some of their gay/LGBTQ friends. While these qualifications served to acknowledge that others had it 'worse' and honor their experiences, it also demonstrated a desire to project an understanding of anti-gay violence onto others, and to diminish their own sense of themselves as marginalized.

Participants also described a third process of minimization in which they acknowledged the existence of discrimination, but denied its impact on themselves: "People may have said things in which I was in their presence, like fag or gay that I was around that made me feel uncomfortable, but they weren't directly targeting me." (Todd) While Todd acknowledged that he felt uncomfortable by others' comments, he qualified his statement by saying that they were

not directly targeting him. Qualifying it in this way allowed him to recognize anti-gay discrimination on campus while also separating his own experiences and identity from this reality.

While minimization served as a mechanism to cope with their marginalization as gay, the process of coping by separating oneself from marginalization also served to disconnect them from their own gay identity and gay/LGBTQ communities. For instance, Bradley described his experience attempting to avoid feeling marginalized by having others focus on the other attributes of him as a person:

I worked as hard as I possibly could to not be treated that way, or to define myself in such a way that I wouldn't receive that negativity. Like, I listened a lot to my father when I initially came out which may or may not have been a good decision, but he encouraged me to you know be masculine and stay in swimming and work hard to achieve and do the best I possibly can, do theater, do band, essentially, to do all of these things to distract from, I don't like that verb, but in a lot of ways that's what I was doing, to just draw people's like, I think less of like, "Oh he's gay," I wanted that to be like the absolute bottom of the list, and in a lot of ways if feel almost disconnected from my sexuality (Bradley)

Notably, Bradley described that this response to his marginalization arose directly from listening to the advice of his father as a means to diminish feelings of marginalization and experiences of discrimination. His father who can reasonably assumed to be a white straight man does not experience oppression based on race, gender, or sexual orientation. The pressure from his father was to conform to a "normal" masculine identity but also to distract from rather than respond to discrimination. He also described that while this process allowed him to distance himself from his marginalization, it also distanced him from his own sense of identity.

In addition to serving to dissociate themselves from their own identity, minimization was also used to distance themselves from gay/LGBTQ communities. This minimization played out in terms of participants distancing themselves with the imagery of gay/LGBTQ communities, as

well as by socially distancing themselves. Nathan described how this process played itself out when viewing images of stereotypical gay men with his father:

There's like, the embarrassment of like, if I'm with my dad and my dad's like pretty conservative, and, like, say we're watching a TV show or a movie and it has like your stereotypical gay men who's feminine or whatever, then there's that moment of embarrassment too of not wanting to be associated with this image, and I think there's a lot of subtler ways that embarrassment comes out too. (Nathan)

In addition to feeling a need to distance oneself from gay culture by “not wanting to be associated with this image” in the eyes of parents and other straight friends/peers, participants also described feeling the need to socially distance themselves from LGBTQ/gay communities. Noah described how when he entered LGBTQ spaces, he feels the social distance between them and himself:

Most times I've gone to those spaces, I don't feel like I'm going to an LGBTQ space, I feel like I'm going into like an island of misfits space... It's weird, like, I feel like there are so many gay people on campus who like don't do that stuff and like there's a like the crowd that gets attracted to those places is very different, I think the people who get attracted to those things are very different from the people like a lot of the other people that I know (Noah)

Noah described how he and “so many gay people on campus” are distant from LGBTQ/gay marked spaces and noted that; “the crowd that gets attracted to those places is very different,” describing them as “misfits.” Noah eluded that associating with these types of spaces marks one as weird. This perception dissuaded him, and presumably the others he observed, from actively engaging in these spaces. The idea of being not normal or a “misfit” was in direct conflict with his own sense of self as normal and separating his sense of self from his marginalization.

Participants' desire to minimize was likely part of their desire to see themselves as fully human. However, as white gay men, this desire might have also been shaped by not having prior

experiences with discrimination before coming out. While participants experienced ambient forms of discrimination about gay people, it was often not directed at them:

When I was younger...other people might not have known it, because I kept it very very quiet about my own identities, I definitely felt like ... everything about gay people was negative. So while it may not have been directed at me specifically, um, my parents didn't like gay people. My mom saw two girls holding hands one time, and a discussion between her and her friend with me in the backseat was like, "Ew. That's so gross, that's so wrong." (Ryan)

However, some participants did describe being targeted before coming out. For instance, Todd talked about being targeted for being effeminate (before he came out):

Moreso in high school, even though I wasn't out, people just definitely treated me differently. There was lots more name-calling or just in general how they treated me, probably just my more effeminate nature. (Todd)

However, these experiences were complicated by the reality while in the closet, participants identified as straight, even if that was in dissonance with how they felt about themselves. For instance, Benjamin described this contradiction:

During the entire time I still identified as straight, I always got along a lot better with women and that also had to do with the fact that I wasn't ever technically straight (Benjamin)

While experiences of the closet are complex and were not explored in depth here, participants' description of their own marginalization before and after coming out demonstrated that ambient and even targeted forms of anti-gay marginalization were not experienced as a direct attack on one's identity, because being gay was not an identity that they openly expressed. While these experiences of discrimination certainly had impacts on participants, they did not directly mediate participants' relationship with the outside world through an identity.

As white men, participants were also not experiencing oppressive victimization or harassment based whiteness or as men. While white gay men might experience other forms of

marginalization related to identity (e.g., religion, social class, disability), in the context of their identities as white gay men, participants did not have to manage tension between their marginal status and dominant society until they began claiming an openly gay identity. Hence, minimization might be a particularly common strategy among white gay men, because it allows them to regain the sense of individuality that they were socialized into as white men, as well as distancing themselves from experiences of marginalization which are new to them when they begin to openly identify as gay. In addition to creating a situation that might be particularly conducive to minimization, participants' identities as white men also shaped how they engaged in minimization, both in terms of diminishing their relationship to their own gay identity, as well as in how they interacted with gay communities. The pressure that was felt from outside communities, including family, and the desire to be 'normal' and accepted within straight (white) communities propelled them to define themselves as individuals, rather than as part of a gay or LGBTQ community.

Discussion

Identity development narratives often privilege the process of coming out, describing it in terms of sexual minorities openly acknowledging and accepting their marginalized identity, ultimately ‘achieving’ an integrated identity (Cass, 1979; Rosario et al., 2004). As white gay men, in many ways, this narrative fits our experiences. While participants who talked about coming out often complicated the overall coming script, the process did involve a transition from an internally held identity to an openly acknowledged one, going through processes of dealing with internalized stigma and developing a gay identity (Cass, 1979; Rosario et al., 2004). The framing of gay identity development in this way reflects our privilege as white men and the centrality of white gay men’s experiences in conversations about marginal sexualities, particularly given the ways in which white gay men only actively handle one form of marginalization (at least, in this case, of race, gender, and sexuality) (Bing, 2004; Ryan, 2003; Rosario et al., 2004). However, findings provided a nuanced look at this dynamic by demonstrating how it was not only the lack of other forms of marginalization (i.e., based on race/gender), but also the presence of privilege that sustained the ‘coming out’ script. Moreover, findings suggest that this process of identity development as a de-politicized process might contribute to the ongoing focus on single-identity and homonormative politics (Cohen, 1997; Duggan, 2004).

The act of disclosure and beginning to live openly as (white) gay (men) demonstrated the process by which we move from being socialized as privileged (at least in regards to race, gender, and sexuality) to occupying a marginal identity. The importance of attending Michigan and the claiming of that space (and the minimization that sustained that claiming) further

demonstrated our privilege and also showed how privileged *spaces* as well as privileged identities maintained these dynamics.

White gay men's socialization as white straight men before coming out is certainly not the same as that of men who identify as straight throughout their lives given the ways that white gay men's own identity is in dissonance with the heteronormative assumptions around them. However, particularly if white gay men do not hold other marginalized identities, coming out as gay represents their first experience of being marginalized through an *openly* held identity, marking coming out not only as an act of self-expression, but also as a transition from interacting with a society that privileges them to one that both marginalizes and privileges them. Heterosexism is distinct from racism and sexism in that gay individuals are often raised in straight families and in straight communities with few role models that hold their same identity (Hetrick & Martin, 1987).¹¹ While findings demonstrated that white gay men might have access to *cultural* role models, the distance between these might prevent the development of a sense of community around gayness. The ways that this process takes a particular form around white gay men's identities might lead to feeling ill equipped to accept and manage one's marginal status, driving a desire to distance ourselves from gayness and gay identity. This desire to displace, rather than embrace gay shame by white gay men can lead to further replications of racism and sexism by displacing this shame onto bodies of women/POC (Halberstam, 2005).

The process of developing and sustaining this process of creating distance between white gay men's identities and our status as marginalized took place both on an individual and community level. For white gay men, the desire to claim an identity and safe spaces separate from systemic marginalization arises not only as a coping mechanism for handling

¹¹ While members of other marginalized groups might commonly live in these types of arrangements (e.g., people with disabilities, families with mixed immigration status), in regards to race and gender, it is likely much more common for women/POC to grow up in a family/community with others who share their identity.

marginalization (Fine, 2011), but also as a result of having the privilege to never deal with other forms of marginalization and the feelings of entitlement to safety and comfort that come with privilege (McIntosh, 1990). The ability for white gay men to actively navigate to more accepting places also helped to reinforce this dynamic. As white gay men living in an environment that is coded as accepting, the ideology of these claimed spaces both drives the desire to minimize, and minimization actively perpetuates these spaces as claimed as safe for LGBTQ people, when in reality, they are not necessarily safe and accepting for white gay men, and are certainly not accepting places for queer women/POC.

While minimization can be seen as a (negative) coping mechanism on an individual level and community level in identity-based terms (Fine, 2011), it should also be seen in its social and political context. The processes of minimization and claiming 'safe and accepting' spaces might also serve to mask the political nature of the 'coming out' process for white gay men, focusing on individualistic feelings of gayness. This reflect the impact of our privilege as white men in viewing and feeling 'coming out' primarily as a process of identity formation, rather than seeing its place in defining a system of heteropatriarchal power dynamics that intersect with systems of race, class, and other identities (Cohen, 1997). Findings demonstrated how coming out *and* living 'out' were sustained as an individual process that was often distinct from gay/LGBTQ communities and a systemic analysis of heterosexism (not to mention racism/sexism). This might help explain the relatively pervasive understanding among white gay men (particularly activists) of oppression based on a model of single-identity politics, rather than a perspective that builds toward a radical, liberationist understanding of power and identity (Cohen, 1997). While multiply marginalized communities of sexual minorities might have to struggle harder for self-acceptance (Bing, 2004; Rosario et al., 2004), for white gay men, the relative ease of seeking out

accepting communities might prevent the development of a structural understanding of one's own oppression, and compel men to seek out a 'normal' gay identity in line with their own privileges, rather than seeing gayness as a means to 'fail' mainstream expectations, and therefore critique systems of oppression and privilege (Puar, 2006). This might also prevent transformative resistance and critiques, and encourage individually based achievement strategies (Camarota & Fine, 2008).

As one participant pointed out, the relative power of white gay men among gay/LGBTQ people has served to rapidly advance the cause of 'LGBT equality,' as changing public opinion demonstrates the successes of these movements in regards to issues like marriage (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012), these changes should be seen in a cautious context. While white gay men's struggles against their own marginality have the effect of elevating conversations about heterosexism in the popular discourse, the ongoing pressure to 'normalize' and mainstream their marginalization might continue to reinforce dominant structures, with same-sex attraction and gay identity acceptable only within normative frameworks (Puar, 2006; Warner, 1999; Wilchins, 2004). That is, participants demonstrated processes through which white gay men might develop an analysis and an embodiment that propels homonormativity as advocated by organizations and movements (Duggan, 2004; Puar, 2006).

Chapter 4: White Male Privilege Shaping Resistance to Heterosexism

When I walk into one of these LGBT identified spaces, like, all of a sudden, I'm a white male and I like, I don't, I'm the person who society has dealt the most power in those situations ... I become the one whose identity is that of the oppressor ... I don't have to think about identity as much, because in this case, I'm like, all of a sudden in the majority in terms of all of my identities, um, so I think that's something that comes with a lot of privilege as well. (Kyle)

Participants' identities as white men also shaped how they understood and participated in resistance to heterosexism. As white men, participants' resistance often responded directly to dominant heterosexist messages and was policed in (white) dominant-straight culture, serving to shape the form and direction of their self-interest (Bérubé, 2001). Participants also described processes through which their white male privileges allowed them to gain and maintain access to power within LGBTQ communities and movements. These privileges created tension between the mainstream political strategies participants were compelled to support and their own experiences. Moreover, white gay men's ongoing domination within the LGBTQ context allowed them to view the liberation of multiply marginalized people within LGBTQ communities in an 'inclusion' narrative that further reified their own privilege.

Responding to Mainstream Messages about Gay Identity

Dominant (i.e., white straight patriarchal, and often middle- and upper-class) culture played a key role in defining participants' own relationship with resisting heterosexism. Participants demonstrated three ways that the mainstream movement was pressured and shaped by dominant culture: (1) implicitly demonstrating the discursive control of dominant structures in defining gay resistance, (2) describing how their own position to marriage was policed in dominant-straight spaces, and finally, (3) by explicitly describing the relationship between mainstream media and LGBTQ movements. The interactions with these dominant messages were formed in participants' own privilege as white men.

In discussing gay marriage, Todd demonstrated the discursive control of hegemonic cultural forces in defining *how* he discussed his stance on marriage. His description of gay marriage responded directly to the rhetorical tools of movements that are working to exclude same-sex couples from marriage:

By saying that having marriage open up to gay people like ruins the sanctity of marriage doesn't make sense, since it's supposed to be separated from religion, and marriage is a license that comes with fiscal benefits ... and that's not offered to gay people, and so, I think a religious ceremony can still be religious, but the marriage aspect to it should be open to anyone with all the- just in general, if you're only allowing it to one group of people connected with benefits and also the status of what is marriage, it's very limiting, so I think it should be open to everyone. (Todd)

Todd's arguments for marriage inherently accepted the existence of marriage and the privileges it grants to married couples. Within this framework, arguments for equal treatment under the law emerged, but also prevented him from taking a critical stance to marriage as a (racist) heteropatriarchal institution. While his arguments can and should be read in terms of his being complicit with an existing system that is racist, sexist, and heterosexist as an individual, it also demonstrated the prevailing power of the status quo in defining the terms of the debate on which gay people are compelled to fight for their own inclusion and acceptance.

Family members in (white) dominant-straight spaces also policed acceptable forms of resistance. Timothy noted how although he is critical of marriage as an institution, he did not frequently voice this opinion with his family:

I hold my opinions a lot to myself to not kind of stir when I'm home, but I think my parents, like, I think gay marriage is a special thing just because marriage is so tied within heterosexual culture too, it's just like- so they assume that I want to be married, and I don't necessarily want that. (Timothy)

Although raised these critiques outside of the context of his relationship with his parents, he was compelled to at least maintain silence about gay marriage, if not accept and advocate for it with

his parents. By questioning marriage, he would be interrogating a fundamental aspect of straight privilege (Warner, 1999), which might be threatening to his parents. By virtue of being a member of his own white family, he was compelled to shape his beliefs, at least in the eyes of his parents, to appease dominant-white-straight communities. Multiple participants described this dynamic within family settings in particular. These were spaces where participants were actively seeking acceptance and support, and within this context, challenging the heterosexual privilege of marriage became linked to not only threatening the privilege of straight family members and friends, but also in turn would risk participants' access to their family as a supportive or at least tolerant space.

Finally, participants also explicitly discussed how the mainstream media focused gay resistance on 'acceptable' mainstream goals:

There's the LGBT movement, rights movement, then there's the queer rights movement. And I see them as two totally distinct things, so one that gets, the one that mainstream society looks at, and the media looks at is the LGBT right movement, so you know, same-sex marriage, anti-discrimination laws, and hate crime legislation, and anti-bullying stuff, which I mean are all great things. (James)

James notes how the mainstream media often focuses on what he describes as the "LGBT rights movement," including issues like marriage, discrimination, hate crimes, and anti-bullying measures. This process was described by many participants and demonstrated how the focus of the mainstream media on these issues often serves to erase other work that is being done that builds toward queer/LGBTQ liberation. The focus of the mainstream media on these issues is likely due to their own interest in providing news coverage and entertainment that has some level of mass appeal. However, Cole complicated this relationship by noting how movements themselves often respond to and reinforce this focus:

I mean I feel like same-sex marriage kind of defines the queer community in the public sphere, although I like disagree that that's like the biggest issue that we should be focusing on, I think that in like public media, that's like our go to. (Cole)

In responding to the focus of mainstream media on marriage and other mainstream goals, Cole describes how the movement itself is often complicit with and recreates this dynamic.

These three dynamics demonstrate how the existing power dynamics of society shape the centrality of LGBTQ liberation on mainstream movements that resist in acceptable ways that are palatable to at least portions of mainstream society. Underpinning and defining these incentives are the dynamics of racism and sexism, which define palatable resistance in terms of whiteness and masculinity. Both dominant pressures of straight culture and the highly visible homonormative strategies of mainstream movements incentivized and encouraged participants to embrace a homonormative framework. In addition, participants' own closeness to these messages through family relationships and white male privilege often limited their own sense of resistance to that which was acceptable and accomplishable within the status quo. This dynamic is particularly important given the ways that participants described gaining and maintaining access to and leadership within gay/LGBTQ communities and movements.

Gaining and Maintaining Access to Gay/LGBTQ Communities and Movements

White gay men's privileged identities as white men created an access point to gay movements and communities (both official and informal). While these spaces often served as important roles of support in their own development and advancing their own interests, the domination of white gay men created an overrepresentation of their identities and issues that directly affected them. These dynamics serve to both reinforce the domination of white men within these contexts, and to shape the strategies and goals of mainstream movements in a white male privileged context that undermines and re-marginalizes the issues of LGBTQ women/POC.

Participants did not describe an immediately harmonious relationship with gay/LGBTQ communities and their own gay identity upon coming out and/or entering the University. These new experiences were marked by discomfort, struggle, fear, as well as excitement and appreciation for finding supportive spaces. While some of their initial discomfort reflected manifestations of internalized homophobia, they also focused on the social dynamics within LGBTQ communities by which they felt excluded:

I think I was moreso focused on the fact that I was at this new place with a bunch of people that I didn't know. And like trying to start this new chapter of my life than I was being focused on the fact that everyone there was LGBT or an ally (James)

James described his experience in terms of focusing on interpersonal and social dynamics within these communities. These types of experiences were common among participants, particularly within official LGBTQ spaces – i.e., student organizations and the Spectrum Center. However, social dynamics often also reflected identity-based exclusions:

I've had conversations with a few of my friends who are queer people of Color who prior to the last few years have tried to break through and change things, but then were just expelled, and talked about, and just ejected from the community, and they just wrote it off as so-and-so is just a horrible person, and so-and-so is just, we just don't vibe well on a personal level, so that's why I just can't work with this person. Like no, you can't work with them because he's a Latino man challenging you on your white privilege. Shut the fuck up. (Peter)

While participants did experience real exclusion and discomfort entering these spaces, they did not face the types of exclusion and marginalization that Peter mentioned his queer people of Color friends had described.

The experience of exclusion and discomfort focused on internalized homophobia, as well as social and interpersonal (and not identity-based) dynamics. These dynamics served as initial barriers for participants to overcome but did not necessarily serve as a long-term pattern of exclusion that might be faced by others. While some participants noted that they did not end up

engaging with these communities, it was never due to feelings of exclusion based on their race or gender.

Participants' own social capital often played a role in getting them involved with these communities. For instance, Cole described how he came to volunteer at the Spectrum Center:

My second semester, one of my friends like, had been like a volunteer, and he was like, yeah, you should volunteer, and so I was like, maybe I should, so I started volunteering, um, and then I found about more of the like different groups through the Spectrum Center that they like advocate on behalf of I suppose, the different events that they put on. (Cole)

Cole's comment brings out two important dynamics in white gay men's relationships with gay/LGBTQ spaces: first, the role of social capital in gaining access to these spaces; and second, the importance of these spaces in providing support. Having a friend brought him into the Spectrum Center allowed him to ease the process of navigating social dynamics within the group and gain access to this supportive community. As participants described this type of access, it reflected their own white and male privilege in having other friends or being able to easily make friends that were already inside of these spaces. As was consistently noted, these spaces had a history of and were often currently seen as white- and man-dominated spaces.¹² To the second dynamic, Cole also noted how coming into the Spectrum Center allowed him to learn about his own identity and LGBTQ communities, issues, and history. While participants built their access to these spaces on their white male privilege, these spaces were important arenas of support around their marginal identity as gay.

In addition to shaping their participation in gay/LGBTQ spaces/communities, participants' white privilege also created a privileged relationship in witnessing and participating in gay/LGBTQ *movements*. In describing their own needs as gay, participants focused on

¹² Despite recent efforts by the Spectrum Center to bring in and include more diverse members of LGBTQ and allied communities

marriage, adoption, and anti-discrimination protections in work and housing. While participants frequently contested that their own self-interest should dictate the goals of LGBTQ communities and movements as a whole (as discussed in a later section of this chapter), the reflection of their own self-interest demonstrated how the needs of white gay men are well-represented in existing mainstream (i.e., homonormative) movements. However, participants also illuminated more complicated dynamics of this relationship.

Participants described that it was not necessarily the interests represented in mainstream movements that were a problem as much as the domination by white gay men and the overrepresentation of those who already have some forms of privilege within these movements. For instance, Ryan described how white gay men use their privilege to gain control over the LGBT movement:

I kind of feel like gay white men have been leveraging their privilege to I dunno, to have kind of sole control, like huge control over the LGBT movement, so I don't think there's an equality of people who represent the LGBT movement at all, and that's definitely when I start to feel like my three identities come together, but I'm definitely one of those people who has the best chance of being accepted in society, because I don't have to deal with other identities that are oppressed. (Ryan)

In focusing on the dynamics of power and control, Ryan was able to avoid coming out or against the agenda of the mainstream movement, and to focus on the issues of representation and involvement in movements. Ryan noted elsewhere that mainstream movements are limited in their lack of attention to issues like poverty that affect people who are not necessarily white gay men. However, this focus allowed him to take a positive stance toward inclusion and representation, rather than a negative stance toward marriage and non-discrimination. Other participants added another layer of complexity by complicating the mainstream strategies in

recognizing their wider impact than the policy changes they directly sought. For instance, Nathan explained why, while he identified as “radical,” he also supports same-sex marriage:

I think that it’s like a white gay male interest to have same-sex marriage, and I completely understand that, but at the same time, I think it can have effects that are as dramatic as lowering rates of LGBT suicide, because it’s still promoting more acceptance, and I think that it’s something that even though is like, is something even from some of my experiences seems to be like this is like a white gay male thing that people want, I think that on the other end, it’s still something that from some of my small experiences that communities of Color also, this is something that’s still, it’s still, and not just communities of Color, too, but I think more marginalized populations, or like, my hometown too where it’s like, just the, the conversation it’s generated. (Nathan)

As Nathan noted, focusing on the domination of white gay men in terms of the issues represented by mainstream movements serves to undermine the widespread and potentially unintentional impacts of these movements in helping those that they do not necessarily center in their work. For Nathan, marriage is not necessarily the problem, but rather the centrality of white gay men. These perspectives allowed the critiques of the mainstream movement to focus on dynamics of race and gender, rather than simply on the issues, although it might also serve to undermine the critiques of the *issues* themselves. However, some participants did also express important critiques of marriage, in particular, and its place in maintaining racism, sexism, and heterosexism.

That being noted, participants also demonstrated how the representation of white gay men also serves to shape the politics of gay/LGBTQ movements. In centering white gay men in mainstream movements, the issues are not only determined by these men, but also framed by them. For instance, Cole described his passion for addressing the barring of men who have sex with men from donating blood:

Something that I’m passionate about that I’m planning on starting an initiative next semester for is blood donation equality ... I understand that HIV and AIDS is like a big issue and that’s like primary cause of the like ban on like gay men to be donating their

blood for like the American Red Cross and everything, but frankly it's not the gay disease that it like once was labeled as, and I think it's like an outdated and obsolete procedure.
(Cole)

Notably, Cole's focus on blood donation equality depended on distancing HIV/AIDS from gay men, potentially undermining the reality that Black men who have sex with men are infected at the highest rates of any demographic group. As a white gay man, he is able to claim that HIV/AIDS is no longer the gay disease it once was, because it is no longer the *white* gay disease that it once was. Not only do white gay men have the ability to claim a larger portion of movements, but when using that voice, they can direct the issues and tactics of movements in way that maintain the centrality of white, man, and white-man identities.

Negative Impacts of White Male Privilege on Own Resistance

Privilege can create damage and harm to those who hold it. For participants, their white male privilege created specific forms of harm in their own relationship to their identity related to the pressure of homonormative political strategies. In particular, this was demonstrated most poignantly by participants in regards to mirroring. Moreover, they were also constrained by the tactics of mainstream movements in their ability to radically resist their own oppression. While these narratives play out their own dynamics in oppressing women/POC LGBTQ bodies and communities, they exerted their own negative influence on white gay men. This harm should certainly not be read as a form of oppression based on their white male identities or as comparable to the negative impacts of racism and sexism on women/POC, but rather a form of harm arising from their privilege that distinctly intersected with their oppression as gay.

“Mirroring” is defined by Bérubé (2001) as “a political strategy that reflects back the whiteness of men who run powerful institutions to persuade them to take ‘us’ seriously, accept ‘us,’ and let ‘us’ in because ‘we are just like you.’” (pp. 241). The pressure to “mirror” created

tension among participants, because their experiences and sense of self were not “just like” straight people, despite attempts to minimize their own marginalization (see Chapter 3). Some participants openly critiqued the strategy of mirroring:

I feel like that [mainstream] movement is so much like, it's trying to say to heteronormative society, or I like to use the term cisheteronormative society, that we're just like you except for this one thing. Like, we, like, it's trying to take, we're trying to fit into this American dream 1950s nice house nice job, white picket fence, 2.5 kids sort of thing nuclear family, when even the rest of the country has, whether or not the Republican party will admit it, has moved on from that. But, that's kind of what, how I see it. The gay rights movement right now kind of wants to be able to fit into that part. Whereas what I think it needs to be is more of a like accept us for who we are because we are who we are. (James)

James described how the mainstream equality movement often played into ideas about society that are not only oppressive and normative, but also that play to the cultural nostalgia in white America for the 1950s. James described the alternative strategy: “accept us for who we are because we are who we are.” This alternative perspective that was put forth both directly and implicitly by multiple participants focused on allowing gay/LGBTQ communities to thrive and exist because of, rather than in spite of difference. Those participants who described this experience, though, were often hesitant to openly contradict the “we are just like you” narrative and struggled between the pressure of the mirroring narrative and their own experiences. For instance, Kyle described the pressure he felt upon coming out to downplay his own identity, and his changing perspective over time:

When I first came out, I had this like, desire to be like, oh I'm just the same old [Kyle], or like, I haven't changed at all, or being gay is just a small part of me, which, on the one hand, I do think I'm like, really like, I'd like to think of myself as multi-faceted, and not just like, I guess that was kind of what I was trying to portray when I told people it was just a small part of me, but at the same time, I feel like that's like denying part of my identity that's hugely shaped who I am, so I think it is like a really large part of how I define myself (Kyle).

Kyle's perspective draws to light the pressure to fit into the mirroring narrative through his own desire to downplay his gay identity as important. However, his multi-layered response and development over time demonstrates the competing pressures he felt. While he defined his gay identity as an important feature in shaping who he is, in his entirety, he also sought to be recognized as a full human being, with complexity and multiple layers. Participants struggled against the heterosexist messages that defined them *only* as gay (and therefore marginal), and also the pressure by mainstream movements to define their gayness as just a *small part* of who they are. Rather, participants sought to define their gayness as both a large and small part of their identities and lives. This pressure was clearly felt in the context of participants' identities as white men. The sense of only feeling this tension and pressure around their gay identity allowed them to place their gay identity in relationship to their sense of self, rather than also with other identities (Bérubé, 2001).

Although the mainstream goals of the equality movement were often seen within participants' own self-interest, they did recognize and/or demonstrate how these goals served to negatively impact their ability to resist heterosexism, shaping their own resistance around assimilation and (homo)normativity. For instance, Aaron described having gained personally from critiquing and de-centering marriage:

I see a lot of advantages for myself personally in the role of marriage. I recognize that I would benefit greatly if marriage was legalized ... but I also see a lot of benefit for myself personally if the question of marriage was, if the institution of marriage was questioned right out, because in a lot of ways, I was brought up that, "Oh you're going to get married one day, you're going to have children, this is what your life is going to look like," and it was a very narrow vision that was imposed upon me ... it really took me a long time to give myself a broader vision for my life and explore like, what about my career ... what do I want my friend networks to look like, what do I want my social justice activism to look like, those questions before were all centered around the family, with the assumption being that a family is a man and a woman and children ... I think the

more that we can challenge the structure of marriage, the more I can have freedom to live the future that I want to live. (Aaron)

Notably, while Aaron was able to recognize that thinking outside of marriage encouraged his own development and sense of self, he was the only participant who demonstrated a critique of marriage being part of his own self-interest. Two other participants did note the potential of marriage to create a “death” of gay culture. For instance, Cameron¹³ described how legalized gay marriage posed a potential threat to “gay culture,” and the variety of ways in which people sexually and romantically relate to each other within gay/LGBTQ communities. He spoke of attempting to preserve these cultures in face of the marriage momentum. Timothy also noted that while marriage was central to equality movements, and likely inevitable, he was worried about the death of gay culture:

Although I do think that gay marriage is like necessary for especially American gay life, I think that afterwards ... I don't want to see gay culture in a way die away in the fact that we're put back into these gender roles of someone stays home, someone goes to work, and we get all of a sudden gendered in how we relate to each other, and so that's a worry of mine, I feel like, so afterwards we may have to cope with what gay marriage has brought about (Timothy)

These three participants spoke to how, in addition to creating tension between participants' lived experiences and the homonormative strategies, equality movements also served to malign alternative forms of resistance that fell outside of the mainstream narrative of white middle-class gender normative lifestyles, some of which resonated with participants. While the normativity of white male masculinity within movements certainly marginalizes and excludes LGBTQ women/POC, it also serves to limit and constrain the resistance of white gay men to their own oppression.

Differentiating Self-Interest and Narratives of 'Inclusion'

¹³ Cameron's interview was not audio recorded, so quotations are not available.

Some participants did not identify LGBTQ activism or movements outside of the mainstream/homonormative movements, reflecting and affirming the dominance of these movements. However, among participants who *did* differentiate gay/LGBTQ movements and queer movements, they focused on queer movements as racially, gender, and sexually inclusive.¹⁴ However, this process often involved making clear distinctions between participants' own self-interest and the needs of *other* members of LGBTQ communities, including trans* people; queer people of Color; and lesbian, queer, or similarly identified women. In distinguishing between their own self interest and that of others, they served to affirm the unique needs of these communities that are different from their own, but they also reinforced a dynamic wherein white gay men have ownership over LGBTQ communities and movements and from this dominant position 'invite' others into *their* community, which has already been centered on their white male identities.

Participants identified the needs of members of LGBTQ communities as a whole, often distinctly from their own. Issues identified included poverty, incarceration, homelessness, and access to healthcare. Participants often distinctly identified these as separate from their own self-interest as gay, signifying the distinctions of diverse needs within LGBTQ communities:

Alex: When you think about yourself as a gay person ... what issues do you think are most important?

Kyle: Yeah, what issues do I think are most important ... I mean gay marriage pops to my mind, just because I think it will have an impact, um, the way that that plays out in the future will have an impact on my life for me directly, but um, I don't know I also tend to try to focus on things that don't impact me personally, so that I, so that I don't just feel like I'm only fight battles that are convenient to me.

¹⁴ Some participants also described the marginalization and exclusion within the movements, but I do not attempt to report white gay men's ability to speak for LGBTQ women/POC here. Suffice it to say that they recognized that exclusion was occurring on the basis of race, gender, and race-gender.

Kyle points specifically to working to help support others and fight their battles alongside them. This distinction made by participants acknowledged the differences between themselves and other members of LGBTQ communities, recognizing the diversity and sometimes the power differences within LGBTQ communities. Participants who expressed this distinction avoided the tendency to attempt to rally all of LGBTQ communities around a single set of interests that is dominated by white gay men. Peter described being frustrated with another white gay man who he perceived attempting to do this:

I was just like almost shouting at this person, and he was just like, how can you try to divide our community, we should all be gathering around our gay identity, and I was like, you're also asking them to gather around your white identity, and you're completely ignoring the other issues that these gay people are facing, so stop it! (Peter)

Peter's comments describe how when white gay men attempt to create unity in LGBTQ communities without distinguishing power differences, they center on agendas and spaces that are historically embedded in white men's privileges.

However, even when participants were supporting greater inclusion and justice within LGBTQ communities, participants described the limitations of existing communities that have been white, man, and white-man dominated. Timothy spoke to the need for greater work that creates space for multiply marginalized communities:

We just have to have a larger conversation about what it means to be a person of color and queer identified and I feel like that's um beautiful that those two [queer people of Color] organizations have started on campus and I am like fully supporting them because that's how we can create diverse queer spaces, to have a safe space for people of Color to talk about queerness, and really support them, and not be involved, but just support them as much as we can and allow them their space and their safety, and then actively try to welcome them into these queer spaces that are predominantly white. (Timothy)

Timothy underscored the importance of supporting queer people of Color organizations as distinct from the existing LGBTQ spaces on campus, acknowledging the need for these

communities to have their own space.¹⁵ Timothy also described in other parts of his interview the ongoing work and struggle of making the already existing communities more inclusive. This inclusion narrative was often hampered by its tendency to focus on building on existing spaces that have been entrenched in exclusion (intentionally or not), and inviting others into that space. Because of the history and challenges of this struggle, the inclusion strategy was limited in providing support and opportunities for women/POC LGBTQ communities. This alternative – supporting spaces for multiply marginalized communities that are distinct and specific – becomes an important companion to the ongoing work for diversity and inclusion within established LGBTQ spaces.

Discussion

While the power of white gay men within LGBTQ communities and movements has been critiqued by those who are excluded through this power (Bailey et al., 2004; Cohen, 1997; Farrow, 2011), these participants help to demonstrate how this process is created from the perspective of white gay men, as well as the potential damages this privileged position has on white gay men as individuals and as a group. Viewing the constraints of white male privilege on participants' responses to heterosexism should not be read as a claim to view white gay men as oppressed by their white race and/or gender identities (Connell, 2005; Coles, 2009; Gordon, 2004). But rather, I seek to show here how the damages of privilege (Feagin & Vera, 1995) have been specifically recreated in regards to the means of resistance of heterosexism.

The mainstream media and participants' own family members policed the forms of resistance which participants were able to express and participate in (Lannutti, 2005; Warner, 1999). White gay men, particularly middle class white gay men come from communities that

¹⁵ Notably, while participants acknowledged this organization and its work, there was no organization explicitly focusing on queer and similarly identified women on campus mentioned by participants. To the best of my knowledge, no such organization exists.

largely experience privilege. Responding to the pressures of these communities meant *reacting* to the hegemony of racism, heterosexism, and sexism, which was seen in the ways that normative institutions like marriage were difficult to challenge among these communities (Lannutti, 2005; Warner, 1999). Further, participants' own acceptance and support was often dependent on maintaining relationships that did not overly disrupt the existing power dynamics of these communities. That is, the support that we experience in dominant-straight communities is often dependent on their ability to fit in to dominant norms, perhaps motivating our own desire to recreate normative messages about their own identity in these communities to maintain access to the power and privilege of dominant communities and institutions (Duggan, 2004; Puar, 2006). This strategy has been reflected on the broader scale in mainstream movement's efforts to claim the capacity for gays and lesbians to be 'good citizens' (Stein, 2002), in a framework where citizenship in the United States means implicitly and actively supporting the global domination of the United States and the West over the Global South (Duggan, 2004; Held, 1991; Walkerdine & Bansel, 2010).

The findings also demonstrated the specific processes by which white privilege entered and recreated itself within gay and LGBTQ communities. As white gay men, we have disproportionate access to social capital, and the feelings of entitlement and confidence that arise from being socialized as white (straight) men (Harro, 1996; Lipsitz, 2010; McIntosh, 1990). Entering gay and/or LGBTQ communities for the first time was still an experience that reflected the realities of heterosexism, in the ways that participants often described feeling anxious, unsure, and intimidated by these environments. In publicly claiming a gay identity, participants felt distinctly the experiences of exclusion and marginalization based on their identity, a process that is marked not just as a one time occurrence, but as an ongoing process (Meyer, 2003). The

conflict between this entitlement and the new feelings of marginalization associated with being openly gay (Bérubé, 2001) might result in white gay men responding out of anxiety and discomfort to retain their feelings of entitlement and control within communities (Halberstam, 2005). Notably, participants often described coming to terms with their own privilege within communities well after they had been ‘out’ and developed coping mechanisms around their gay identity.

As privileges compel those with them to sacrifice their own humanity in general (Feagin & Vera, 1995), similar dynamics played out here in regards to participants’ own relationship to their resistance of heterosexism. This was particularly played out in the context of white gay men’s lives in the contemporary moment, with an increased entrenchedness of homonormativity in defining ‘gay rights.’ The experiences of white gay men help to demonstrate the allure and danger of homonormativity (Bérube, 2003; Duggan, 2004; Warner, 1994). However, the domination of white gay men within mainstream movements hurts not only those it excludes (Bailey et al., 2004), but also those who fit (Bérubé, 2001). Specifically, findings demonstrated the limitations created on how we not only resist our own domination, but also the ways that we relate to the resistance of multiply marginalized communities to heterosexism.

As Aaron described, a critique of marriage (and by extension, homonormative politics) is not only one that can expand conversations about anti-heterosexist work to be more inclusive and comprehensive, but also one that benefits white gay men by allowing us to deviate from the mainstream expectations of society. Marriage equality, military service, and hate crimes legislation continue to feed into racist heteropatriarchal structures of family, production, U.S. militarism, and the prison industrial complex (Bailey et al., 2004; Boggs, 2012; Lannutti, 2005; Stein, 2002). These institutions recreate and comprise larger systems (e.g., capitalism, global

domination, neoliberalism, and punitive understandings of harm), which compel those who privilege and profit off of them to maintain a damaged humanity by taking on the role of the oppressor. While white gay men are privileged relative to other members of LGBTQ communities, part of our own oppression is tied up in these systems as well (Bérubé, 2001). Economic discrimination (through housing and employment), and the prison industrial complex (e.g., through police brutality) have and still continue to affect white gay men, not to mention gay and LGBTQ communities as a whole. As white gay men, in supporting homonormative assimilationist politics, we are asked to participate in our own oppression, rather than being given (or intentionally claiming) the opportunities to resist heterosexism as a complete system (Duggan, 2004; Freire, 1970).

Many participants thanked me at the end of the interview and/or talked about how rare it was to have a conversation with another white gay man about race, gender, and sexual orientation. The rarity of these types of conversations recreates the dynamic in which those with privilege are hesitant and/or limited in their ability to speak openly with other members of the privileged group about their own identity (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Harris & Edwards, 2010; Kimmel, 2000; Lipsitz, 2010; McKinney, 2005; Myers, 2003). However, participants did not just note that they were appreciative to talk about race and gender, but also highlighted that they sometimes rarely had the opportunities to talk about their own marginalization as gay. While these comments were often made outside of the actual interview, and are not, strictly speaking, considered data, they do seem to point to the ways that we've been damaged in how we talk to each other. This might be, in part, a delineation of our own privilege as white men, and the ways that we've been incentivized to demonstrate strength, as well as the pressure to conform to a normal identity that is not in tension with straight culture.

Findings also demonstrated ways in which privilege as white men also damage how white gay men relate to other members of the LGBTQ community. As participants suggested, among LGBTQ communities, white gay men ‘become white men.’ This also damaged white gay men’s ability to communicate with and support women/POC within these communities (Feagin & Vera, 1995; Harro, 1996). As participants described, when we enter LGBTQ communities, our sexual minority identity becomes the majority, and perhaps even, a dominant identity in comparison to bisexual, queer, and similar identities, as well as becoming ‘white men’ in that we have the most relative power based on race and gender. In addition to creating barriers and challenges in working with multiply marginalized members of our communities (Feagin & Vera, 1995; Harro, 1996), as well as projecting white male assumptions (Harro, 1996; Pease, 2010) about gay identity to be projected onto members of other communities, which might be inappropriate and oppressive of alternative forms of sexual (and gender) minority identities (Rosario et al., 2004). Interestingly, as some participants focused on the identity-based domination of white gay men, while continuing to support the homonormative agenda (e.g., marriage). I would venture to guess that this is in part due to the University of Michigan context, in which social justice education (mostly based around identity) has become institutionalized. In some ways, this focus on identity *instead of* issues might serve to reaffirm that homonormative strategies might be desirable if they were more multicultural. If this is the case, it represents a way in which ‘diversity’ rhetoric that contributes to homonormativity (Duggan, 2004) recreates itself, even in critiques of homonormativity.

Shaping one’s response to heterosexism in homonormative terms allows gayness to become an accident of one’s birth, a minor obstacle to overcome in succeeding and thriving in the broken and exploitative system of neoliberal capitalism. The visibility and availability of

these strategies can prevent white gay men from using their failure to meet the expectations and norms of dominant society as a departure point from the prevailing power structures of society, and a politicized 'queer' identity as marginal (Cohen, 1997). However, those who resisted this by questioning the exclusive and assimilationist politics also engaged in a complex form of what could be deemed 'self-allyhood for social justice.' While actively engaging in understanding their own privileges as a limitation and seeing the need for collective liberation in regards to racism and sexism, participants were engaging in aspiring allyhood for social justice (Edwards, 2006); however, in seeing the liberation of their oppressed identity tied up in this collective liberation, this allyhood became a process of not only adopting a radical/progressive perspective on heterosexism, but a complex form of resistance that incorporates their own privilege, i.e., self-allyhood for social justice (Cohen, 1997).

Chapter 5: Marginalization as Gay Forming Replications of Racism and Sexism

[White gay men are] still in a position of having a fair bit of power in society and having a fair bit of privilege in society ... This is going to come off as crude, um, but basically we're fucking-a-vagina away from having all the power (Benjamin)

As white gay men, participants were socialized into a system that implicates them in the recreation of racism and sexism. While participants commented on and demonstrated many aspects of how they perpetuated these systems of oppression, I focus here on the major themes that emerged that were specific to their gay identity. These manifestations of racism and sexism were both coded as gay, and directly related to their status as marginal in a heterosexist system. Throughout, participants both responded to and actively claimed their identity in reaction to marginalization within a heterosexist system while also recreating their privilege as white men, and subsequently, the oppression of women/POC.

Gay Sexual Racism

Participants described a type of overt racism that was perceived to be common in (white) gay men communities: discrimination based on race in selecting sexual and romantic partners. This *gay sexual racism* included specifically discriminating against men of Color by only sleeping with/dating white men, as well as the exoticization of men of Color, and was enacted specifically in the context of the marginalization of their sexuality in a heterosexist society.

While no participants openly admitted that they prefer or were only attracted to other white men, they identified other gay men who openly discriminated against men of Color in their choice of sexual/romantic partners. James described how he observed this process:

I very rarely see things that are saying “No white men,” like, “I’m not interested in white men,” as often as I see “I don’t like black guys,” “I don’t like Asian guys,” “I don’t like Latino guys,” “Middle Eastern guys.” Like, those are all very common things (James)

This form of gay sexual racism served to center white beauty and privilege the white body within gay communities by systemically demeaning the bodies of non-white racial and ethnic groups. In addition to rejecting men of Color as sexual/romantic partners, participants described witnessing other gay men exoticize men of Color and sexually objectifying them. Aaron noted how this exoticization took the form of wanting to sleep with certain groups of men of Color, but not wanting to date them:

You know there's enough fetishization of people of Color within the gay community, and really within any white community, that you know, hooking up might not be an issue, but once it comes to dating, I know plenty of white people who wouldn't date people of Color, as terrible as that is. (Aaron)

Considering only white men as viable options for dating and romantic relationships serves to affirm the humanity of white gay men as individuals, while limiting recognitions of physical beauty of men of Color to the context of objectification. Together, these two mechanisms of gay sexual racism affirmed white gay men as beautiful and sexually desirable while also affirming their worth and complexity as humans. Participants also noted how this process replicated their own access to physical beauty as white:

I think if I was a different race or ethnicity, that my experiences would be a lot different. It almost seems like it's easier to, people are more attracted, like gay men are more attracted, I feel like to people who are the white, built, stereotypical figure. (Todd)

In this way, participants not only perceived sexual racism as a system that marginalized others, but a system from which they benefited in terms of their own privilege. Participants noted that sexual racism appeared to be a particularly common phenomenon among white gay men, and identified these dynamics as most easily visible on gay hook up sites and at gay clubs. These spaces (and participants' own sexuality) occupy a marginal position in a heterosexist society, and sexual racism replicated dominant systems of race, beauty, and exoticization within these marginal communities. However, in addition to recreating dynamics of racism within these

spaces, gay sexual racism also appeared to emerge as a response to the marginality of these spaces and participants' own sexuality.

Peter was the only participant¹⁶ who discussed his own relationship to perpetuating sexual racism. His description of his own sexual racism might help elucidate how white gay men's marginal status encourages sexual racism:

I'm someone who thinks of myself as pretty progressed in terms of my knowledge of social justice, but oftentimes I'll find myself saying, oh, like, "Middle Eastern men, they're so attractive," and I catch myself, and I'm just like, ugh, that was so implicitly and in ways explicitly racist, and I think the idea that you're attracted to specific qualities in someone isn't necessarily, I mean, it stems from a lot of things that we've been trained to think and how we've been conditioned to think of attractiveness, but I also think such an important way of dealing with that is how you talk about it, and I think, yeah, sure if your preference is Asian men, there are plenty of ways that you can phrase that to be more inclusionary, or not be so blatantly offensive and putting people down (Peter)

Peter was able to recognize the broader context in which his statement about Middle Eastern men was made, both in terms of the ways his own attractiveness was influenced by his socialization, as well as the racist implications of his statements and similar statements made by others. Peter identified that the best strategy for interrupting sexual racism was in changing how white gay men talked about their attraction, hoping that others can find ways to describe their own tastes and preferences without openly offending others. This strategy was productive in that it attempted to work against outward expressions of racism that marginalize men of Color. By focusing on the expression of the desire, and not the desire itself, Peter demonstrated an understanding of attraction as something that is felt deeply internal and difficult if not impossible to change in and of itself, regardless of the recognition of how desire and attraction have been shaped by social forces (i.e., racism).

¹⁶ Because the interview protocol did not directly ask about gay sexual racism, it is possible that other participants were actively engaging in and/or resisting their own relationship to gay sexual racism in different ways.

White gay men's expression of sexual and romantic desires toward men inherently conflict with heteronormative assumptions about sex, romance, and attraction; however it is possible that as *white* gay men, in expressing their desires in defiance of these external pressures, also remove any external pressure to make their sexuality 'politically correct.' Feeling the need to temper what they experience as an individual taste might lead white gay men to view attempts to curb these feelings or the expression of them as an attempt to police their sexuality into 'acceptable' categories, *perhaps* a similar feeling to the one of being compelled to participate in heterosexuality. Notably, participants often focused on targeting individual racial/ethnic groups for likes/dislikes, rather than men of Color as a group, further demonstrating how these forms of sexual racism were experienced as a matter of personal taste. Because participants' sex lives and gay sex environments occupy a marginal status, it is also possible that the expression of and acceptance of sexual racism allows white gay men to maintain a sense of power and control over their own sex lives, and to feel physically and sexually validated.

Disgust with and Control Over Women's Bodies

Similarly to gay sexual racism, participants primarily identified witnessing overt acts of sexism by other gay men and not misogyny that they participated in themselves. These manifestations of sexism focused on participants simultaneously claiming their gay/man identities and asserting their gay identity in contrast with straight men, and served to affirm and recreate their privilege as men.

Peter described the ways that he sees other men participate in misogyny in terms of disgust with the female body:

Alex: I wanna go back to your point about how you see gay men participating in sexism towards women.

Peter: Well where to go with that? I mean, I can talk about the disgust with the female body, like, that's a thing in and of itself, "Ew, vaginas, gross, Ew, boobs, gross."

The disgust with the female body served as a means to both affirm gay men's gayness, as well as to recreate the oppression of women. By displaying their disgust with the female body/women's bodies, gay men counter the heteronormative assumption that men are sexually and physically attracted to women, affirming and claiming their gayness. However, this disgust also translated misogynistic messages about women's bodies into a gay-specific recreation of sexism.

Peter also went on to say that he saw gay men recreating sexism by sexually touching women without their consent:

...while simultaneously [gay men are] really objectifying women by grabbing their boobs whenever they want, making out with them whenever they want, because they're gay, they're non-threatening, and they can just make out with women without asking for consent (in a sarcastic voice:) because they're gay men. Ah we're fabulous (still sarcastic). (Peter)

This form of sexism was recreated in a context where gay men were seen as "non-threatening" (i.e., not straight men), and used that position to control women's bodies, contradicting the idea that they are non-threatening, which had allowed them access to this position in the first place. These instances were often described as being coded as "non-threatening," humorous, and light-hearted, at least to the (white) gay men involved, if not also the women. This allowed for white gay men to mask their own use of masculine domination. Ryan further demonstrated how (white) gay men's objectification of women marginalized women and affirmed the masculine power of (white) gay men:

There was a girl and a [gay] guy was like, "I just want to make out with you, it's just for fun," and she was like, "I don't really want to," and he was just like, "Let's make out," um and the girl's like "What is this kind of ownership?" or "What is this kind of thing that some people think that some gay men feel?" and I'm like, and there's no sexual interest, so what's- what's in this relationship? Power? (Ryan)

Ryan described how gay men asserted their gay identities (“it’s just for fun”) while also relying on their privilege as men and recreating dynamics bordering on sexual assault without sexual attraction, clearly marking the recreation recreation of individual and social power in these interactions. Participants often discussed women as a monolithic group, not necessarily differentiating by race or sexual orientation (or class, ability, nationality, or other identities); this was also a limitation of the interview protocol and my own probing questions, which did not delineate specific questions about how relationships across gender lines were also sexualized and raced. However, among participants who *did* qualify their relationships with the women by identity, they referred to these dynamics with *straight* women. These dynamics, then, appear to emerge in the heterosexual marketplace of straight culture.

These participants described a process through which gay men were attempting to assert their gay identity in light of heteronormative assumptions of men’s attractiveness, and in the process relied on existing mechanisms of sexism, and recreated these dynamics in new ways specific to their gay identity. Through these processes, white gay men continued to use women as objects for their own sexuality, not as sexual objects for their lust or desire, but as props against which to define their own sexuality with a lack of interest. Within these processes they also used their marginal status to maintain their dominance as men, and while their gay identity allowed them to remove their dominance as sexually marked, they used sexual assault and control to maintain and recreate their gendered power.

Resistance to Privilege by Claiming Marginalization

Participants who resisted their own privilege focused on their marginalization as primary, using it to ‘cancel out’ any advantages they might have received as a white man as well as using

it to justify avoiding the feelings of guilt they associated with privilege. Participants also resisted their own privilege by over-associating masculine privilege with straightness.

Todd captured the belief that one's marginalization as gay would cancel out any advantages he received as a white man:

I'm afraid that once I have a job and people find out that I'm gay, those that aren't as accepting will treat me less, and then my acceptance as being a white man wouldn't matter anymore, because they'll just think of me as being gay... and even if they don't necessarily look down upon gay men, I'm afraid that in the workplace, once I'm considered gay, the associations of being goal-oriented and driven and successful as a white man will like go away, and then I'll just be like the supporting role. (Todd)

This understanding relied on an additive framework of multiple identities, rather than an intersectional one,¹⁷ in that their marginalization and privilege were not seen as interacting with each other, but rather cancelling each other out. Notably, Todd routinely used the word "privilege" throughout the interview, but made comments like these that indicated that while he had been taught that he had privilege, he had failed to internalize the injustice of the unearned advantages he had received.

Noah provided another example of how he saw his marginalization cancelling out the impact of his privileges:

I think that there are probably some parts of our institutions that are innately racist, because they're based on like white cultural norms... I think that there's white privilege when it comes to you know commercials, you know, are mostly all white...but at the same time, when it comes to that type of privilege, I don't feel super bad about it, because as a gay man, like, you know, most of the people on commercials are straight, and as a gay man, most of the products you get sold are like heterosexual-oriented, you know, cleaning products are like for women ... And that just seems normal to me. Like I don't resent it. So I don't think that it's causing like a big struggle. (Noah)

Noah claimed that his feeling of exclusion from advertisements by virtue of his gay identity meant that he had no obligation to acknowledge that he did gain privilege from the over-

¹⁷ Perhaps "subtractative" might be more appropriate verbiage here. White * Man – Gay = 0?

representation of white people in advertisements. He also centered his own marginalization in describing cleaning products marketed towards women as heterosexually oriented, glossing over the sexist implications of these messages. However, he also described feeling that the response to having privilege was to “feel bad about it,” and throughout his interview, he discussed privilege in terms of feeling bad and guilt. In seeing guilt as the primary response to having privilege, he cancelled out that need to “feel bad” by pointing to how he was also excluded, and therefore already “felt bad.”

In addition to the process of focusing on their marginal status in a heterosexist system, participants also resisted fully acknowledging their privilege by associating male privilege with straight men. Participants routinely demonstrated the heteronormative and white-centric assumptions that “men” refers to straight white men. For instance, Kyle caught himself making this assumption:

When you said to me, like white gay man, I immediately thought white straight, wait did you say white gay man? You said white male, right? (*Alex: Mhm*) Yeah, when you said to me white male, sorry, I immediately thought white straight male, which I guess is even more interesting, because I’m a white gay male, like that’s who I am, um, I automatically assumed this was a straight person (Kyle)

Kyle’s comment reflected how the category of “white man” is often coded as “straight,” unless otherwise specified, even among gay men. This exclusion from images of masculinity was sometimes used to avoid seeing oneself in the role of having privilege as a man. For instance, when Todd was asked if he felt there were any responsibilities that men had, he said:

The man should have the responsibility now to validate and treat, if it’s like a straight relationship, the woman as an equal, and I think it’s a responsibility of recognizing any differences, or because the man would be like in power in the situation, is offering the opportunity, maybe the man should stay home, and the woman can go and work, and the man should have the responsibility of bringing it up... I guess society assumes that the

man is going to propose, the man is going to fix everything, and that the woman is supposed to like, look good on the side. (Todd)

While Todd provided a compelling description of opportunities for anti-sexist behavior among straight men in relationships with women, he masked his own access to privilege as a man by focusing on *straight* men's responsibilities as allies.

In and of themselves, both of these strategies of resistance to privilege allows white gay men to remain complicit in systems of oppression, demonstrating how gay identity creates a specific recreation of racism and sexism. However, above and beyond this phenomenon, participants also demonstrated how a lack of awareness of their privilege created further replications of these systems.

Erasing the Realities of Racism and Sexism

Participants demonstrated how a lack of understanding of one's privileged position as white men allowed them to erase the differences between heterosexism, racism, and sexism, and center their understanding of oppression on their own marginalization. This process went beyond simply resisting their own privileged status to use their marginalization to take ownership of all forms of oppression. For instance, when Noah was asked about experiences of discrimination he said, "I'm trying to think about another time where I've been discriminated against. I wish I had a story where it was like a restaurant refused to serve me, but like I don't." Noah evoked a popular image of the Civil Rights movement: African Americans being refused service in restaurants. In evoking this image, Noah erased the distinctions between racially based discrimination and anti-gay discrimination, not to mention erasing the historical and regional differences therein. While this erasure reflected and replicated a lack of understanding of racism that inherently perpetuates the status quo, Aaron also pointed to how erasing the differences between forms of oppression can allow white gay men to actively claim the oppression of others:

I think when I first started coming out, I didn't view oppression in a nuanced enough way, so I think that I was kind of like, I'm the same as a Black person, or a woman, or somebody with a disability, or an illegal immigrant [*sic*] in the United States, etc. etc., which given all of my other privileged identities is not true at all, and so I think, in some ways, that almost formed a greater barrier [than] if I just wasn't gay at all, because it almost forms a pretense of, "I understand you so I'm going to speak in specific ways, or be assertive in specific ways, that I wouldn't if I were straight," which I think honestly does more harm than good. (Aaron)

Aaron was able to reflect on this experience in retrospect, demonstrating how assuming that all oppression is the same led him to assume that his experiences were the same as those of members of other marginalized groups. As he notes, the privilege he holds as a white man allowed him to be assertive in claiming oppression and speaking for others. Certainly white men, as a group, have the ability to claim their privilege and speak for others. Aaron points to the way that holding a gay identity allowed a particular form of this ability to speak for, because white gay men's own marginalization allows them to claim ownership of the experience of being oppressed. When combined with their identity as white men, this process of claiming ownership recreated and reinforced these dynamics of white, man, and white-man privilege.

Discussion

These findings revealed that as white men, white gay men not only have the capacity to recreate systems of racism and sexism within the context of gayness, but also recreate these systems in ways that directly respond to our marginalization as gay (Halberstam, 2005). As outlined in earlier chapters, white gay men are often socialized into privileged roles as white men (Harro, 1996), and coming out involves publicly claiming a marginalized identity, often for the first time. In claiming this identity, it is necessary for white gay men to assert their own sexuality and sexual/romantic desires for other men. Findings demonstrated that this played out both in terms of racism and sexism.

In regards to the forms of gay sexual racism uncovered in the findings, it was clear that the sexualized aspects of heterosexism shaped the context for perpetuating racism *in reaction* to our own marginal status. White gay men's sexuality is shaped not only in a context that seeks to oppress and marginalize same-sex attraction, but also within systems of race/gender domination. And while systems of race/gender domination do not *determine* desire, they can influence how it becomes embodied, experiences, and expressed (Green, 2008a). While white gay men carry their white male privilege into sexual environments; these environments might not *feel* like one's in which they are powerful, both due to the external marginalization of these spaces, and the ways that sexual spaces can reconfigure social hierarchies (Green, 2008b). And while the ability for men of Color, in particular Black men, to gain erotic capital within these sexual environments often depends on playing into stereotypical and marginal roles (Green, 2008b), it still might create an additional layer of threat to white gay men's sense of power and control in these spaces. The combined reactions to one's own socialized sexual desires (Green, 2008a) and reacting to social relationships, both within and outside of gay sexual environments might motivate our ongoing investment in affirming their access to erotic capital and sexual dominance in these spaces. Notably, erotic capital, while a distinct phenomenon in and of itself (Green, 2008a) also provides access to social capital, validation, and resources (Hamilton, 2007; Green, 2008b). Hence, while gay sexual racism was formed in the context of sexual spaces, its impacts extend much further.

In relationships with (straight) women, we also might also react to marginalization by grasping for a greater sense of control and power (Harris & Edwards, 2010); however, the findings showed that these dynamics were formed in relationship to one's marginal status based on identity and social role, rather than sexuality *per se*. Hamilton (2007) describes the processes

by which straight women use same-sex eroticism with other women to gain erotic capital (Green, 2008a; 2008b) in the heterosexual marketplace, while also socially distancing themselves from lesbians and lesbianism. When white gay men use their subordinate position as gay to recreate misogynistic messages about women's bodies and validate their own sense of control, they participate in a similar process as straight women using eroticism to gain capital within a heterosexual marketplace (Hamilton, 2007); however, for these men, the condition of de-eroticization that these interactions take on bypasses the erotic capital and provides access to social capital, position, and masculine power.

Gay sexual racism and the misogynistic treatment of women's bodies among white gay men describe not only the persistence of white masculine privilege in the face of heterosexism, but also the contribution of heterosexist marginalization to the ability of white gay men to attempt to reclaim our privileged role in society (Halberstam, 2005).

In addition to outwardly recreating racism and sexism, participants also resisted their privilege in unique ways, particularly relying on their marginalization to 'counter' the impact of their privilege. Again, while the process of resisting one's own privilege can exist among all privileged subjects (Harris, 2003), as white men, we might have difficulty identifying with these forms of privilege given the ways that they do not ourselves feel powerful (Bérubé, 2001; Harris, 2003). Further, acknowledging one's white privilege might threaten one's sense of self and their own accomplishment (Lipsitz, 2010), including, for white gay men, any sense of progress and identity development that they have gone through. These findings also reflected some of the dynamics of homonormativity that have been described in movements and organizations (Duggan, 2004; Puar, 2006) among individual white gay men (Bérubé, 2001). Namely, the focus on single-identity politics (Cohen, 1997), which has been argued to not only distract from other

issues, but to compel 'gay rights' movements to shift away from a coalition-based
Leftist/progressive politics (Duggan, 2004).

Chapter 6: Mapping a White Gay Dominant Masculinity

While the research question sought to explore the impacts of participants' marginalization and gay identity on their participation in racism and sexism, a distinct set of themes emerged that demonstrated participants' relationship to what I call *white gay dominant masculinity* (WGDM). WGDM emerged as a theme that reflected participants' specific relationship to their identity as men and having masculine privilege, created in the contexts of their identities as white, gay, and white-gay. In this chapter, I focus on male/masculine privilege, in this context. As expressed by participants, WGDM focused on: responding to dominant stereotypes of white gay men's identities that combined feminine and masculine gender expression that masked their own masculine privilege; exclusion from hegemonic masculinity that was policed by straight men, but experienced through their own shame; and experiencing a distinctly gendered and sexualized form of masculinity policing among other gay and similarly identified men.

Responding to Dominant Stereotypes of White Gay Men's Gender Expression

As white gay men, participants interfaced with specific stereotypes that were defined by their whiteness and their identities as gay men. Participants often explicitly noted how their white and male privilege allowed them access to images about themselves, a privilege that was often not afforded to other sexual, gender, and/or racial minorities (e.g., Black gay men, trans* people). These stereotypes focused on participants' gender expression, which fell out into two analytically distinct categories: *aesthetic* and *relational*. The dominant stereotypes of white gay men embodying a *feminized aesthetic* and *relational masculinity* allowed participants to gain access to masculine privilege that was often less visible than the masculinity of (white) straight

men. However, this process was built on the stereotypes of themselves that served to marginalize them and stifle their own complex sense of self.

Aesthetic Femininity

Participants often described dominant images of white gay men in terms of a feminized aesthetic, although some participants did not note the racialized aspect of these images, reflecting the normativity of whiteness. This stereotypes created assumptions about white gay men's physical bodies (being fit, muscular, tall), interests (art, cooking, theater, pop music), and physical presentation (wearing bright colors, flamboyant mannerisms, and a higher pitch of voice).¹⁸ For instance, Noah described the messages he received from society about gay men being focused on being well dressed, stylish, and having an effeminate presentation:

I feel like society probably gay being, society likes to say being a gay man means being well dressed is one thing. And I feel like that's probably like, style and gay men just go hand in hand. Um, then you know effeminate mannerisms or voice, and I think that's really like it of what I've got of what it means to be a gay man from society. (Noah)

James described how he and friends went to a "tippers and strippers" theme party,¹⁹ and the straight man they were with went as a "tipper," and another of his gay friend went as a stripper:

The two of us who are gay both went as the strippers, wearing short shorts and like fishnets, and a vest and a bow tie sort of thing, which I feel like that sort of thing – being scantily clad, and like, stuff like that, and those are situations like, parties it's much more of a gay men expectation – a white gay men expectation, I don't know if that's a race thing, but definitely a sexuality thing. (James)

Others' expectations of he and his friend's gender presentation as (white) gay men focused on aesthetically presenting as feminized, in this case, dressing as the 'women's' half of the party theme – the strippers. While James was unsure about how race played into these expectations,

¹⁸ Notably these images also reflected middle- and upper-class privilege as well, focusing on stereotypes that were based in consumption and access to cultural capital and financial resources.

¹⁹ "tippers and strippers" referring to a party where the guests dress up as those patronize and work in strip clubs, respectively.

the reality that many participants acknowledged was that, due to the normativity of whiteness, messages that were coded as being about gay men were often implicitly coded as being about *white* gay men, unless otherwise specified.

Relational Masculinity

In addition to these messages, participants also described the expectations of white gay men to embody masculinity in their relational style. These messages included things like being loud, outgoing, confident, and sassy. For instance, Nathan described feeling these pressures as a gay man:

Yeah, I mean, I think especially currently the messages are from the media and elsewhere, like, oh, it's like, OK to be gay, and you are this like type of gay person that's you know, monogamous, like super outgoing, friendly, confident, etc., um, would be like the biggest messages that I receive. (Nathan)

Benjamin also described this type of relational masculinity:

[Being a gay man is] for the most part not seen as a negative thing and um it usually comes with me just being a very loud and on occasions sassy individuals (Benjamin)

Notably, while participants described these pressures, they were often *not* described explicitly in terms of masculinity. However, they reflected the masculinity of these messages in the ways that they were described as ways of taking up space, dominating social relationships, and presenting oneself as outwardly confident. And as with the messages about aesthetic femininity, while participants did not always code them explicitly as white, messages about gay men are communicated in the context of white normativity, where gay men often means *white* gay men. Participants' relationship with this identity was based on their white privilege, which is not to say that gay men of Color do not receive similar pressures, but to point to the these messages might have been felt particularly strongly by participants because they *do* fit, at least in terms of race and gender into the dominant representations of gay identity.

Aesthetic Femininity and Relational Masculinity Masks White Gay Dominant Masculinity

The combination of these forms of masculinity and femininity often operated together in a way that allowed the aesthetic femininity to overwrite and hide their relational masculinity and resulting masculine domination. Notably, aesthetic femininity was identified both more often by participants and was seen as more obviously associated with white gay male identities. In addition, aesthetic femininity was explicitly coded as feminine, placing white gay men in a marginal position within heteropatriarchal society. This position served to distract from white gay men's masculinity privilege, as well as directly masking their privilege as white men. Because of the focus on feminine aesthetic, relational masculinity was coded in terms of femininity in ways that hid the masculinity of these interactions. For instance, Ryan described the stereotypes about gay men as feminine that he perceived:

What makes a gay man is equally is equally polarizing... gay men like to cook, gay men love high fashion, gay men make bitchy comments to each other, which yeah. (laughs)
(Ryan)

In describing white gay men's interactions with each other as "bitchy" it coded them as feminine; however, coding gay men as "bitchy," or as other participants described "catty" and "sassy," hides the relational masculine domination of these interactions, which might alternatively be described as dismissive, rude, or aggressive. "Bitchy" and "sassy" comments used by white gay men can still recreate their own domination and masculinity.²⁰

These descriptions of the stereotypes of white gay men, including the function of aesthetic and relational masculinity, were often seen in terms of the expectations of others and in tension with participants' own sense of self and gender expression. However, it demonstrated the

²⁰ Even participants' comfort using the word "bitch" to describe themselves and other gay men might be symptomatic of this privilege. Their own identification with a feminine aesthetic might serve to hide the sexism inherent in men using this word.

forms of femininity and masculinity to which they had access, based in their identities as white gay men, and moreover, the avenues to masculine privilege that they maintained. Participants described using this access to succeed and thrive in dominant-straight spaces, including in classrooms, social relationships, and with family members. However, this access was still often based in the ability to maintain tension between one's sense of self and the expectations of the outside world.

Impacts of Dominant Stereotypes about White Gay Men

Stereotypes of white gay men created feelings of marginalization among participants both in terms of (1) the dismissal and erasure of their individuality by others, as well as (2) causing tension with their own sense of identity, particularly around their gender expression. The expectation of a feminine aesthetic, for instance, allowed others to erase participants' masculine interests:

I love outdoors activities... and I feel like whenever people found out about my identity as like a queer person, they kind of belittle those other things about me and they're like, oh, so you don't really want to go camping, you don't want to do all these like, typically like manly man things (Cole)

As Cole described, these stereotypes were often used even in existing relationships, with others assuming that once white gay men come out as gay their masculinity should disappear. These expectations of others dismissed and silenced participants' interests as well as their individuality. However, the masculine/feminine binary, in particular, was routinely seen by participants as insufficient to describe their own sense of self.

In order to fit culturally sanctioned roles, and to receive the privileges of WGDM, participants were compelled to diminish the complexity of their gender expression, which often included integrating aspects of masculinity and femininity outside of the binary. Participants frequently described employing and identifying with both masculine and feminine gender

performances in different contexts, as well as gender performances that contradicted or exceeded this dichotomy. However, this complexity was marginalized by the expectations of others:

So if you look at some of the messages that I've received about what being a gay man is, definitely, definitely also pushes you toward the other end of the spectrum. Being in the middle makes everyone uncomfortable. Um, if you're not one way or the other, if you're not super masculine or um, super feminine, in the gay community, like, what are you?
(Ryan)

Claiming the privileges associated with WGDM, including access to supportive spaces as gay men, created tension between these expected images and participants' sense of self. In the context of their ongoing access to WGDM, this demonstrated the ways that they were damaged by constraints created by their masculine privilege. Participants' masculinities and the resulting harm were further contextualized through their relationships to (and exclusion) from hegemonic masculinity.

Exclusions from Hegemonic Masculinity

Participants routinely described how their own relationship to gender and masculinity was strongly influenced by the experiences of exclusion they felt from hegemonic masculinity. This was most evidently seen in their lack of relationships with straight men; almost all of the participants described that there were few to no straight men in their lives that they felt close to or supported by. Noah described how men were seen as unsupportive, particularly straight men:

I feel most supported, um, (pause) I don't know, I feel, probably most supported to express myself as a white gay man (pause) when I'm in a situation with a lot of women, I guess I would say. I feel less comfortable around men, and less supported by other men, especially you know men who aren't gay, obviously. (Noah)

Noah also noted that the discomfort between gay and straight men was "obvious." Relationships with straight men were described as difficult and/or non-existent, and those who did have close relationships with straight men often acknowledged that these were exceptions to the general

rule. In addition to reflecting on their own experiences, these participants also exposed the reality that there is a larger cultural norm that is being played out here. For instance, Timothy notes that this cultural formation is powerful enough to contradict the reality of physical bodies:

Everything is portrayed in society and like straight men are the enemy to gay men specifically, and so um, like being on guard for some reason. I'm also like, I'm 6'4" and I'll fuck your shit up so don't mess with me. (Timothy)

The narrative of straight men as the “enemy” to gay men was strong enough to keep Timothy “on guard” despite being confident in his ability to physically defend himself from any anti-gay attacks from straight men.

Creating and Maintaining Barriers with Straight Men

Participants described the processes that developed and maintained this script on an individual level in terms of the maintenance of barriers by straight men and the internalization and maintenance of these barriers by themselves and other gay men. The manner of describing each ‘side’ of the barrier also served to affirm and center the immutability of straight men’s culture and personalities. Missing out on potential friendships and connections with straight men was felt in terms of sadness and loss. However, given the ways that relationships with men were culturally sanctioned as masculine, this sadness should also be seen in the ways that it reflects how exclusion from relationships with straight men was also an exclusion from participants’ access to masculinity and masculine privilege.

Exclusion from relationships with straight men was often identified in terms of straight men’s communication style, the content of their conversations (especially sports), by objectifying women, and making anti-gay jokes. These were often described in terms of unchangeable aspects straight men’s personalities and masculinity, affirming their own exclusion as well as the dominance of straight men.

For instance, Cole described how straight men tend to speak in impersonal ways that he finds alienating:

[The communication style with straight men is] definitely not as personal, it's not as like hitting at the core of like issues and ideas, and like what we should be talking about as humans, it's more kind of face value, doesn't really like, get super deep sometimes, you just kind of have to like roll with it, act like you know what sports are (laughs). (Cole)

Notably, Cole distinguishes between how straight men speak and “what we should be talking about as humans,” noting the disconnect he feels between the communication style of straight men and his own sense of how individuals should relate to one another. In addition to communication style, he also noted, as many other participants did, that sports and other masculine topics of conversations were often felt as exclusive.

Participants also understood straight men's conversations about women as being exclusive to them. While some participants noted this exclusion in terms of their own inability to talk about women as potential romantic/sexual partners, others extended further to also include feeling excluded specifically by the ways that straight men objectified and demeaned women.

For example:

Like, I have a really close friend who was trying to get this girl really drunk so he could sleep with her, and I was like, no, that's not cool, I don't want you doing that. Um, so it impacts me in that I don't think women are things to be talked about like they are conquests (Ryan)

Ryan's feeling of exclusion was based not only on his lack of interest in women and ability to talk about them in an objectifying way, but also the discomfort he felt in viewing others demean and marginalize women. In addition to the marginalization of women, jokes about gay identity were also seen as common and understandably off-putting for gay men. Notably, in the participants' experiences, even ‘accepting’ straight men frequently used anti-gay jokes.

Straight men I've interacted with have a tendency of making jokes about homosexuality, and I honestly find that across the board ... Even the ones that, the straight men that I know in my life who claim to be supportive of gay rights and gay people ... jokingly hit on each other all of the time ... The only reason that the things that they're doing is funny is because it's two men, you know, being intimate with each other, you know, that's the core of the joke, so they're ultimately making fun of my sexual preferences, which makes me really uncomfortable, and feel excluded (Aaron)

These comments, while reflecting their own experiences of exclusion, were often described in terms of straight men's culture being a more or less fixed reality.

Maintaining and Internalizing their Own Exclusion

Participants identified their own discomfort as the primary *source* of the barrier to relationships with straight men, even in the face of knowing that straight men around them are accepting. The creation of this barrier often originated in the experiences or anticipation of discrimination perpetrated by straight men. However, it resulted in a long-term internalized barrier between participants and straight men. Benjamin captured how this process develops and becomes sedimented:

A lot of it comes from the fact of, them having been the primary aggressors in me growing up, and yeah, actually they've been the sole aggressors, so that kind of establishes a little bit of a boundary there with me just seeing the potential in straight men, basically any time I see a straight man there's that potential there, um, so that adds to a little bit of fear to it, and the fear leads to being uncomfortable, the uncomfortable comes across as not having anything to say, and which leads to overall difficulty with not being able to strike up any conversation or sustain long periods of like acquaintanceship that would lead to friendship that would lead to being a close friend. (Benjamin)

Because of the experience of straight men as the primary aggressors of anti-gay violence, participants described developing discomfort with and fear of straight men that extended to preventing social relationships. The fear created by direct, personal experiences of discrimination are augmented by the anticipation of harassment in "seeing the potential in straight men" to be violent towards white gay men. While the self-created distance started out as and was maintained

as a coping mechanism to avoid and deal with participants' marginalization, it extended far beyond that.

This barrier was strong enough to override participants' knowledge of straight men as not actively homophobic.

Even though I realize that so many straight or heterosexual men don't have a problem with the queer community like whatsoever, I still feel this constant paranoia of being judged because of my experiences growing up and being targeted, like, being called gay, being called like a fag. You just have this like, constant voice in the back of your head, you just think that's what they're thinking, even though I know that's really not, but that's still a barrier for a lot of relationships for me, and it is hard for me to connect with straight men because of that (Cole).

Cole described how the uneasiness with straight men was maintained by a "constant voice in the back of [his] head," describing the degree to which the maintenance of this barrier becomes internalized. For many participants, their discomfort with straight men was a constant struggle.

While the participants described processes of mutual exclusion as policed by straight men and maintained and internalized by themselves and other gay men, in viewing the exclusion by straight men as immutable and experiencing their own internalization of this barrier, they often placed the blame for this exclusion on themselves, resulting in feelings of shame. Kyle demonstrates this process in his description of his relationship with his one close straight male friend in the city he was currently living:

Yeah, I mean we're not like even close, like I don't, like I feel like I still don't open up with him like I feel like I do with women or gay men. Um, but I don't know if that's just because I don't feel comfortable opening up to him or he just doesn't like open up to people in general, I've always felt with straight men that it wasn't that I was like, not like, talking about things that I wanted to talk about, or not like opening up to people, but I would just like, sort of assume that straight men don't do that as much, which (laughs) I guess is, a stereotype of course, but um, that's just kind of part of my reaction to straight men. (Kyle)

In describing his half of this friendship, Kyle uses words like “comfort” and “opening up” - focusing on things that can be changed – feeling more comfortable, being more willing to open up. Whereas in his description of the straight man friend, he uses: “just doesn’t open up,” “don’t do that as much.” These descriptions are reflective of a larger theme wherein participants focused on their “reaction to straight men,” assuming a level of immutability in straight men’s cultures and personalities. Their own internal maintenance of this barrier, perhaps because it was more distinctly felt and well understood, was felt to be changeable, but was also viewed as a personality flaw. For instance, Noah described his experiences of barriers with straight men:

The barrier is I don’t know how accepting they [straight men] are of gay men. Here it’s better because I feel more comfortable but before I didn’t know how accepting they were of gay men so I was very standoffish towards them and like that probably made them not really be able to connect to me ... I still do feel like a barrier, um, but I don’t think that it’s just about my sexuality to be honest. It’s more about being someone who hangs out with so many women, there’s a difference in how you communicate with women and men. And it’s a switch and the switch is so weird to me that I have to like work on where I have to change communication styles. (Noah)

In describing the barrier he felt with straight men, he described this discomfort as him being “standoffish,” which prevented straight men from connecting with him. He also noted that being able to communicate in a masculine style is something that he needs to “work on.” The understanding of their end of the ongoing barrier with straight men was experienced not only in terms of changeability, but became associated with negative evaluations of self, and feelings of shame and blame. This process of self-blame serves to both describe and affirm the power of hegemonic masculinity, both by demonstrating its influence on painting straight men’s masculinity as natural/essential, and in placing white gay men in a position to attempt to (but always fail to) gain relationships with (white) straight men. While this process was perhaps the most common description of participants’ relationship to masculinity, they also implicitly

demonstrated some of the gendered aspects of their relationships with other gay and similarly identified men.

Sexualizing Gender Policing with Other Gay and Similarly Identified Men

Men's masculinity is often primarily policed by other men, including policing masculinity as gender expression and by encouraging a culture of competition and social and emotional distance (Kimmel, 2000). Men are seen as the arbiters of approving one's masculinity, and socially punishing femininity while rewarding masculine behaviors. These dynamics existed in participants' relationships with other gay and similarly identified men and were further complicated by sexual relationships or the potential of sexual relationships. Hegemonic (white straight) masculinity was seen as sexually desirable, reaffirming the dominance of hegemonic masculinity as well as gay men's marginal status in relationship to hegemonic masculinity. Sexual/romantic relationships also created tension between and among gay men, not only reinforcing social and emotional distance based on masculinity, but also separating participants from potentially important sources of social support.

Sexualizing Gendered Policing of Masculinity within White Bodies

Other gay men actively policed participants' gender expression through their sex lives. Straight masculinity was seen as sexually desirable and provided access to greater sexual opportunities for gay men. Participants identified the specific type of masculinity that was seen as attractive in gay communities: "There's frequently on Grindr, it'll be like, "masc/M," "masculine looking for same," "no femme guys," "I like men, so you better act like one." (James) As with sexual racism (see chapter 6), these forms of sexual policing of masculinity were often most common and/or most easily visible on hook up sites and at gay clubs. The creation of sexual incentives for masculinity included both focusing on stereotypical ideas of

masculinity, as well as by associating this form of masculinity with straightness. For instance, Bob described how this form of masculinity was associated with a “bro image”

There are certain types of masculinities that seem very privileged in the gay community here, and certain types that seem very not privileged in the gay community here, um, a lot of people I’ve known have been very attracted to this kind of bro image that seems to be really prevalent here.²¹ (Bob)

The “bro image” prevalent on campus refers loosely to fraternity brothers, reflecting the contextual image of hegemonic masculinity tied in with straightness, affluence, whiteness, a masculine physical body, and being unemotional and uncaring. Participants also explicitly noted how this policing of hegemonic masculinity included white identity:

I was talking to someone, and I was like, I feel so unattractive, like, I’m a size whatever waist and I gained some weight, and you know, my boyfriend is so attractive and hot and he can be with anybody he wants, and blah blah blah and he always knocks me for saying those things, and my friend checks me and they’re like, [Peter], regardless of how he looks, you’re still a skinny, tall white man. Navigating even sexual spaces is way easier for you, as opposed to being, for example, my partner, shorter Latino, stocky. (Peter)

Peter noted how his own white identity allowed him greater access to the physical beauty and sexual spaces that is tied up in the image of hegemonic masculinity that was seen as sexually desirable among white gay men.

Participants described trying to actively shape their own identities and physical bodies to meet these expectations and gain access to sex. For instance, Bradley talked about driving his body to physical extremes to be seen as physically attractive and masculine:

I was like, oh, if abs and some pecs are good, why not go to the absolute extreme and start going on a lot of different protein powders, did weight training regimens, swam all year round. And like I say that I enjoyed the health and wellness aspect of my sport, I enjoyed the sex that came along with my sport. (Bradley)

²¹ Interestingly, Bob went on to describe how the “bro image” that was seen as masculine on campus would be coded as feminine and even as “gay” in his home community.

Notably, the two participants who mentioned actively seeking out this type of presentation mentioned it in the context of feeling tension with their own gay identity and gay community, reacting their own feeling of internalized homophobia and exclusion from the community to attempt to claim access to this privileged image. In reacting to their feelings of marginalization, they sought to meet the images that were seen as sexually and romantically desirable by other gay men. However, it was because of the privilege of their white bodies that they were able to meet these expectations, even if it came at the cost of changing themselves or even driving themselves to physical extremes. White gay men's access to a white body that could potentially be shaped in this image both gives them access and potentially propels them to seek it out uncritically.

In addition to policing a certain formation of masculinity as sexually attractive, participants noted how the inclusion of being "straight acting" in this image served to reinforce participants' own marginal status to hegemonic masculinity:

And ugh. The whole masc/straight acting thing, you're straight acting, so you're ... sleeping with women and not with men, is pretty much what you're saying when you say that "I want someone to be straight acting," OK, so you want someone who's not going to sleep with you (Peter)

As Peter noted, being "straight acting" is inherently in contradiction with having gay sex, and continuing to valorize this image recreated the centrality of hegemonic masculinity. Gay men are ultimately destined to fail this performance of being "straight acting" because of their gay identity, recreating a cycle of privilege of and marginalization by (white) straight masculinity.

Sexual/Romantic Tension Exacerbating Emotional and Social Distance among Gay Men

Some participants described having other gay men in their lives as key sources of support, with the ability to form relationships that served as key sources of social and identity-

based support. For instance, Cole described how other gay and similarly identified men served as source of sympathy because of their shared experiences:

With like the queer [male] friends, it's more of a sympathy, like we're going through like the same thing, on a day-to-day basis. (Cole)

These relationships were often a unique form of support. As Cole described, because other (white) gay and similarly identified men were going through the same thing, they were able to provide support based on their shared experiences. While relationships with women and straight women in particular were common among participants, these relationships were often limited in that women, especially straight women, were often seen as being uncomfortable talking about participants' relationships with men, and gay male sex in particular.

However, not all men described feeling comfortable with other gay and similarly identified men. Relationships with other gay men were complicated by dynamics of sexual tension and competition between men who were potentially attracted to each other. Jimmy noted how he experienced this tension on an individual level.

If I think the guy's attractive or if I may be someday interested, I feel a little more self-conscious, yes, but if he's not my type, or if I'm not attracted, I don't feel any different. (Jimmy)

For Jimmy, when he was attracted to another gay man, he felt more self-conscious because of the sexual potential and the desire he felt. Noah illuminated how this self-consciousness affected gay men as a community:

There's a level of cattiness sometimes there's also like a level of sexual tension or competition, like there's either one or the other or both... I kind of want more gay friends, but I find that it's just kind of hard to connect with them. (Noah)

Noah described how gay men compete with each other over other gay men but also have sexual tension with each other (or both). Sexual aspects of straight masculinity are often conceptualized in terms of individuals competing over women. Among gay men, gender policing of masculinity

was experienced both in terms of a similar form competition over other gay men as well as potential attraction to each other.²² For Noah, tension was part of a barrier he felt in attempting to connect with other gay men. These forms of tension might exacerbate the social and emotional distance between men in particular ways for gay and similarly identified men.

Discussion

White gay men's performance of a white gay dominant masculinity focused not on the replication of the set of cultural symbols that define hegemonic masculinity, but on the maintenance of their access to masculine power. While this in line with the recreation of hegemonic masculinity as a system of masculine ideology (Connell, 2005), for white gay men, the production of WGDM served as a reaction to our marginalization as gay men, as well as specific marginalizations based on assumptions of femininity. While white gay men can engage in a variety of gender expressions and self-definitions (Wilson et al., 2010), the pressures of dominant constructions of white gay men code white gay men as feminine or masculine, and typically, as feminine. In dominant-straight culture the association of white gay men with a particular form of femininity, one that is also typically associated with consumption, serves to place them in contrast with hegemonic straight masculinity. This image both limits and marginalizes white gay men and also allows them the opportunity to get 'off the hook' for their masculine privilege, often by actively coding the masculine aspects of their lives as aesthetically feminine.

The form of WGDM that was demonstrated by participants in this study is only part of the puzzle, and various forms of white gay dominant masculinities likely emerge, particularly around different dynamics of socio-economic class, age, and geographic region. However, the

²² Which is not to say that straight-identified men do not experience some forms of homoerotic attraction, but that it's not typically seen as a possibility.

findings herein depict a form of masculinity that continues to reinforce both the masculine dominance of men, and center the privilege of hegemonic masculinity (Cheng, 1999; Coles, 2009). As dominant and hegemonic masculinities oppress women and privilege (and constrain men), the findings discussed herein focus on the impacts WGDM has on gay men themselves. The impacts that it has on women/POC are better studied by women/POC and investigating the experiences and stories of women who experience the negative impacts of WGDM (Pease, 2010). Suffice it to say that in the process of WGDM, the centrality of male privilege serves to continue to the ongoing oppression of women, as seen in the previous chapter, wherein gay men actively and implicitly participate in sexism (Coles, 2009; Harris & Edwards, 2010).

WGDM is clearly created in the context of heterosexism. Particularly for gay *men*, straight men are seen as the primary aggressors in their marginalization (Pascoe, 2005; Wilson et al., 2010; Woodford, Howell, Kulick, & Silverschanz, 2012). In responding to this norm and coping with their own marginalization, participants internalized and maintained the shame and distance they felt from gay men, focusing on straight men's culture as fixed, with their own inadequacies as a personality flaw. While this process was shaped by participants' marginalization as gay men, this sense of inadequacy and over-valuing others' masculinities is also symptomatic of many forms of masculinity (Kimmel, 2000). The process of internalizing one's own inadequacy and the subsequent desires create the sense of constantly need to 'fix' oneself and seek the validation of other men (Kimmel, 2000). Through this process of gender policing, the image of hegemonic masculinity is constantly reaffirmed as desirable and ideal for men (Kimmel, 2000).

As white gay men, our exclusion from this imagery is based on the heterosexism and homophobia embedded in masculinity (Kimmel, 2000). This exclusion as an identity group

creates our masculinity in a context that is constantly marginal, but the creation of this dominant masculinity still recreates sexism (Coles, 2009). Moreover, this form of dominant masculinity is characterized as constantly attempting to attain hegemonic masculinity, centering the privilege of hegemonic masculinity. Participants demonstrated this dynamic in their sadness of the loss of straight male friends.

However, as white gay men, the privileging of hegemonic masculinity played out not only in terms of seeing hegemonic masculinity as an ideal expression of men's identities, but also through the sexual attraction to men. Participants' own sexual desire was geared toward hegemonic masculinity, which was culturally enforced among straight men. The combined embodiment of masculinity as an identity as well as the object of sexual desire created complex dynamics among participants. However, these dynamics each, in turn, contributed to the emotional distance between and among men, as well as the constant privileging of hegemonic, straight, white masculinity.

Chapter 7: Using Marginalization to Understand the Oppression of Others

I view diversity and oppression ... different from everyone else in my immediate family, just because of this one additional identity that I have, that happens to not be the majority in this case ... we're all white people who are pretty well off and have been pretty privileged in life, yeah, I guess that's kind of my comparison group when I think about myself and how I view all these issues ... [as] counterfactual to like what my life would have been if I hadn't been gay.

(Kevin)

Some participants did describe various aspects of a comprehensive understanding of power and privilege, including recognizing the importance of considering multiple identities and forms of oppression; embracing an intersectional (rather than an additive) framework to structural understandings of oppression; and, recognizing the impact and injustice of the privileges they had received as white/men. Unlearning their own role in oppressive systems required recognizing their own socialization in racist/sexist systems, as well as by critically understanding the racism/sexism in their communities, including among family members. While the dissonance between their past and current understandings of racism and/or sexism were sometimes marked by guilt or shame, this dissonance was also marked by some as points of reflection that were part of an ongoing process of recognizing and working against multiple forms of oppressions. Participants described a number of strategies that allowed them to engage in unlearning and resisting systems of racism and/or sexism.

In particular, participants' marginalized identity as gay played an important role in this process by serving as an entry point to exploring identity, oppression, and social justice, and by motivating them to take action. Learning opportunities outside of participants' own marginalization helped created the distinctions between various forms of oppression, suggesting a significant opening for anti-racist and feminist allyhood among white gay men. However, participants' focus on their own marginalization might have created distinct limitations by seeing oppression through a lens of heterosexism, as well as developing consciousness around gender,

but not necessarily race; and further by focusing on race and gender within gay/LGBTQ communities but not necessarily understanding their privilege in society writ large.

Recognizing Shared Mechanisms of Oppression

Participants' gay identity and the resulting marginalization sometimes created an opening that allowed them to further explore power, privilege, and identity in relation to race and gender. This entry point was often marked as a moment in time when participants recognized a shared mechanism of oppression between women/POC and themselves. While some participants used their own marginalization to resist acknowledging their privilege (discussed in Chapter 5), other participants acknowledged that their gay identity had helped them to recognize the oppression of women/POC while also qualifying their experiences as different from those of women and people of Color:

[Being gay] definitely has helped me [understand other groups that are treated unfairly]. There have been times where I've been like in my school, when I thought, "Damn, I'm the only gay person in this room." And when I got to college ... I thought to myself, "Damn, there was one girl in my grade ... and she was Black, and how must she have felt every day at school, when she was the only Black person in a sea of white faces?" ... So I have definitely taken some of the things I felt and I've been able to connect them. They're obviously not exactly the same ... Just because I am gay doesn't mean that like the world is completely against me, because I'm still white and I'm still a man (Ryan)

For Ryan, the experience of being "the only one" helped him recognize what it might have felt like for a woman of Color in his high school to be "the only one," while also acknowledging his privilege as a white man. Other participants shared similar examples of these 'a-ha' moments, including experiences of tokenization, isolation, essentialism, and the marginalization of sexuality. For instance, Nathan described participating in an activity where participants had to move forward or backward based on their experiences:

One of the questions was like, are you ever uncomfortable or discriminated against because of the race of your partner, and then there were like a couple of people, and I

think they were largely people of Color that stepped forward ... there's the structural sort of oppression, which I kind of, I think from being a small town or whatever sort of relate to, but not really, because I don't think it's the same. ... I do have these structural opportunities that I've benefited from systems of privilege and oppression. (Nathan)

Nathan was able to see how individuals being uncomfortable because of the race of their partner might relate to his own experiences of being uncomfortable holding the hand of another man in public in his hometown while also recognizing the distinction between these experiences, and indeed, his own privileges in comparison to women/POC. As white gay men, participants' marginalization often focused explicitly on their sexuality and gender. Moments where they were able to see the marginalization of others based on sexuality and/or gender often served as particularly poignant a-ha moments.

Participants who described their gay identity as providing an a-ha moment often continued on to seek out further explorations of race/gender/racism/sexism through the experiences of others. They often reached out to members of marginalized groups and learned about their oppression and/or engaged in self-education (e.g., through reading blogs/books by and about people of Color/women, seeking out courses on social justice or identity-related issues). For instance, James described a class he took in which he related his experiences of tokenization to that of people of Color. He described the impact of the class:

Since then it's been a lot more of me looking at like I guess the way that society has structured these sorts of like, these sorts of oppression around identities and the privilege that exist around being a man, being white, being straight, Protestant, you know, Protestant in mainstream I guess, secular in academics. Kinda since that moment, it's been a lot more of a I can't even like really describe it, but it's definitely I guess that class took me much more on a social justice path than a middle class white guy path (James)

For James, his experience in that class allowed him to recognize the experiences of marginalization others faced, and the distinctions between those forms of marginalization and his own – even if the initial recognition came through seeing the sameness of their experiences. That

class, which focused on racism as a system, provided an opportunity to understand racism on its own terms, taking him down a “social justice path,” and helping him to understand oppression and privilege of multiple identities, including race and gender.

Motivations to Support Anti-Racism and Feminism

Recognizing racism and sexism did not stop with participants simply developing an intellectual understanding of oppression, but rather, they often felt compelled to support anti-racist and feminist work (although they did not always name it as such). This work included supporting women/POC; working with, educating, and challenging other white men; and, supporting and/or advocating for institutional and macro-level change. Participants’ motivation for these actions was often based in similar processes as recognizing shared mechanisms of marginalization that led them to explore identity, power, and privilege in the first place. For instance, Benjamin described the responsibility he saw that white gay men have to support women/POC:

I think that [white gay men] actually have an obligation that if you also want a better world for yourself, you should also make a better world for people that may not have as much privilege as you do (Benjamin)

Benjamin couched the obligation of white gay men to support others (i.e., women/POC) within their own marginalization and resistance to that marginalization. This process implicitly demonstrated an understanding of oppressions as interconnected by affirming the need to respond to heterosexism, racism, and sexism. James also described a similar process, in which his own experience of marginalization directly motivated his desire to stand in solidarity with others:

I’m never going to understand what it’s like to be Black or Latino or Asian or whatever but like there is the part like, I understand like a (pause) part of, that part of it. Where it’s just like, you can’t help the fact that you’re being treated as a representative of your entire, everyone of your race or your ethnicity or your religion or like that’s not your

fault, so I will stand here with you and I will fight for you until this, until we are all treated as equal people and not as demographic groups. (James)

James' description of standing up for equal treatment continued to focus on his own understanding of his marginal identity as gay. That is, he related to the struggle of women/POC directly through his understanding of tokenization (and the desire to not be tokenized), which notably, was also the shared understanding that first motivated him to explore racism and sexism. He also assumed that others did not want to be treated as "demographic groups" like him. While marginalization created an important source from which participants felt both motivated and obligated to support anti-racism and feminism, it is possible that this focus on relating to racism and sexism through one's own marginalization also encouraged them to only see these systems in terms of their negative impacts on women/POC, and not necessarily their own privilege. As demonstrated by James' comment, this focus might also lead to a slippery slope, in which participants limit their understanding of oppression to those aspects of marginalization that they share.

Marginalization as Gay Creating a Path to Understanding Sexism but Not Racism

It was often easier for participants to develop an understanding of sexism out of their own experiences of marginalization whereas understandings of racism were less easy to internalize – understandable, given the obvious ways that participants felt their own exclusion from and by masculinity, linking their own marginalization to that of women. The links between racism and heterosexism as experienced by white gay men are often much more subtle, particularly given the ways that whiteness is so frequently made invisible. Aaron reflected on how he had developed an understanding of the social construction of gender directly out of his gay identity, but that he was able to build in an understanding of racism over time:

I think that um, and this has less to do with the white, especially at first, but I think that over time, the white has been added into it, I think it's helped me to meaningfully understand that both gender and sexuality are performances, that they're not biologically ingrained, that they're learned behaviors ... Now that I'm out, I have to constantly navigate between people's expectations of me as a man, while simultaneously trying to be my authentic, true self, and I think that the white comes into that in that, because I recognize those two identities as performances, I've also gained a better understanding of how other social identities, such as race, are performances (Aaron).

As Aaron describes it, feeling and understanding the social construction of sexual orientation and gender was the core from which he was able to understand all identities as performed and socially constructed. Importantly, Aaron described experiences where he was compelled to think about race, suggesting that while white gay men's marginalization as gay might be an obvious starting point from which to develop their allyhood as men, additional resources and learning is needed to integrate understandings of race and racism.

Understanding Racism and Sexism within Gay/LGBTQ Communities

Gayness also served as an entry point by providing participants with a shared identity with queer women/POC. Shared marginalization in heterosexism served as a means through which relationships were developed across race/gender, and other individuals often challenged them to investigate and understand racism/sexism within gay/LGBTQ communities and white gay men's own privilege. While these processes allowed for exploration of race/gender within gay/LGBTQ communities, it is unclear if a similar understanding of or compassion toward straight/cisgender women/POC was developed.

Being challenged by queer people of Color often allowed participants to see the racial dynamics of exclusion within gay/LGBTQ communities. For instance, Ryan described his relationship with one of his friends, a queer man of Color:

I don't know he just poses a lot of hard questions, and um, a lot of my friends don't tend to think of those things, so, my goal had then been to discuss it with those friends, and

when I heard the opposition from them, I was like, “Woah.” These are a lot of tough questions about race, like, is the LGBT Commission set up to encourage minorities who aren’t represented to be there? Or is it just a huge group of white people, um, and no one had super great answers to that. (Ryan)

This relationship prompted Ryan to start considering issues about race that he had previously not been compelled to think about, opening up his understanding of exclusions within LGBTQ communities based on race. Peter described a similar type of learning that happened by hearing the experiences of lesbian, queer, and similarly identified women:

All of my queer or lesbian identified female friends are just, always tell me, introduce me to your other lesbian friends, because I don’t know any, they’re like, we just hog the community, and steal it and do whatever the fuck we want with it, and then claim that we’re this inclusive and progressive community (Peter)

The contradiction of exclusion within gay/LGBTQ communities was particularly notable to participants given the rhetoric of inclusion and acceptance that surrounds gay identities within these communities. The exclusion of women/POC members of LGBTQ communities, then, seemed to be not only an injustice, but also hypocritical. It is also possible that participants were better able to understand some of the negative impact of this exclusion, because they had experienced what it was like to be closeted, questioning, and/or struggling to find acceptance of their gay identity.

However, it is unclear how this type of learning did or did not translate into a greater understanding of racism and/or sexism as it affects straight/cisgender women/POC. While these relationships developed a greater understanding of participants’ privilege within LGBTQ and gay communities, they might resist acknowledging their privilege in society at large by focusing on their own marginalization (see Chapter 5). While shared marginalization was a means to develop relationships with queer women/POC, similar mechanisms did not apply to

straight/cisgender women/POC. For instance, Aaron described how queer people of Color were more approachable than straight/cisgender people of Color:

Having at least one shared identity is really helpful for me in terms of allyhood ... I think that a lot of my race activism, or race ally work, or however you want to phrase it is with queer people of Color, and I think that again that it has to do with that common ground that we share with having a queer identity together. ... I also think that this is probably partially has to do with people of Color, you know are associated with danger in my head so much growing up because of the messages that I received, but gay people and LGBTQ people in general are associated with images with images kind of like fluffiness or frivolousness, like, oh they're not something to be afraid of, and so I wonder if to some degree the queer people of Color cancels out the kind of danger message to some degree for me... haven't thought through what this part of what I'm saying actually is, but I imagine there could be something more there, the messages I've received are canceling each other out and making it so that I can more comfortably interact with people of Color who also identify as queer. (Aaron)

While having a gay identity opened roads for some participants to begin to explore issues of race, gender, racism, and/or sexism, these issues were often only explored in the context of their shared marginalization (i.e. gay/LGBTQ spaces), doing little to develop meaningful relationships based on allyhood with straight women/POC. Aaron also tentatively suggests that QPOC might be seen as 'less dangerous' than straight/cisgender POC. While participants were not directly asked to discuss allyhood to women/POC along lines of sexual orientation, Aaron's suggestion bears some weight, especially given the ways that communities of Color are often portrayed as being aggressively anti-gay. Notably, Cameron described an instance of physical anti-gay harassment by a Black man and noted that he had struggled against his own desire to react to this by using his perpetrator's race as a way of explaining and understanding the situation. Persistent images of people of Color as violent, particularly as violently anti-gay might create additional

barriers in white gay men acknowledging and owning their own privilege in regards to straight and cisgender people of Color.²³

Discussion

Participants' own marginalization as gay often served as an entry point, providing them with the opportunity to recognize the oppression of others through their own marginalization; however, they avoided centering exclusively on their own marginalization by using these 'a-ha' moments to explore these issues further, rather than assuming that they implicitly understood racism and sexism. While the specific strategies and experiences they engaged in are not described herein, these processes have been explored elsewhere (Broido & Reason, 2005; Edwards, 2006; Fabiano, Perkins, Berkowitz, Linkenbach, & Stark, 2003; Goodman, 2000; Reason, Roosa-Millar, & Scales, 2005). However, it is important to highlight the importance of forms of outside learning that are both identity-based and non-identity based, as there might be critical overlaps in the allyhood development process and empowering marginalized youth (Camarota & Fine, 2008; Wernick et al., 2010). In particular, among participants, education processes outside of identity formation allowed them to avoid the pitfall of refusing to acknowledge their own privileged position. Further, this process not only led to an understanding, but also a motivation to take action (Edwards, 2006).

These themes reveal significant points for hope and opportunities on which to build. In particular, given the ways that white gay men might be able to relate to women/POC could lead to opportunities to develop allyhood for altruism (Edwards, 2006) – i.e., allyhood for supporting and marginalized groups. While persistent barriers exist to developing a sense of allyhood

²³ The realities and complexities of the dynamics between and within communities of Color and LGBTQ communities are complex. Given that participants were not directly asked these questions, I hesitate with potentially overstating my findings here; however, critical consideration is needed in further research. Others have considered in more depth the complexity of this question (e.g., Meyer, 2012).

toward women/POC that includes an understanding of one's own privilege and the importance of collective liberation (see Chapter 4), these openings might be an important starting place from which to develop further consciousness (Edwards, 2006). Moreover, allyhood for altruism represents an important piece because of its focusing on centering on the experiences of those who have been marginalized as unfairly treated. Attempting to too hastily encourage white gay men to engage our own privileges without an understanding of privilege might lead to an over-focusing and centering on ourselves as privileged subjects, even in the process of attempting to dismantle that privilege (Murphy, 2011).

Particular care and attention must be paid to the dynamics of this allyhood, though. Participants clearly demonstrated the relationships between understanding sexuality, desire, and gender formations (Rubin, 1984); however, drawing linkages to race was more difficult. This reflects a larger pattern of associating understandings of gender and sexuality together in a way that can subsume sexuality under gender and undermine the realities of sexuality on its own terms, as well as its connections to issues of race and class (Calhoun, 1994; Rubin, 1984; Sommerville, 2010). Further, as participants were able to focus on, develop relationships with, and learn from queer people of Color and sometimes lesbian, queer, and similarly identified women, they might be limited in their capacity to enact allyhood toward women/POC as groups (Cohen, 1997). While communities of Color are often 'blamed' for anti-gay violence and attitudes (for instance, following the passage of Proposition 8 in California in 2008), these attitudes in reality might be due to the influence of dominant U.S. (i.e., white) culture (Herek & Gonzalez-Rivera, 2006), and as means for communities of Color to assert a politics of respectability in resistance to racism and the racist influences of dominant U.S. culture (Meyer, 2012; Schulte, 2002). As noted in chapter 4, participants' might resist their privilege in

dominant-straight spaces by clinging to their marginalization as gay. Given this dynamic, it is possible that while white gay men might be willing to admit our privilege *within* gay/LGBTQ communities, we have more difficulty acknowledging our racial/gender privilege in comparison with straight and cisgender women/POC.

Chapter 8: Unique Respondents

While this study focuses on the intersections of race, gender, and sexual orientation, participants raised issues that were not directly sought after in the research question but still provide important insights to other intersectional considerations in the lives of white gay men. In this chapter, I present two participants as individual ‘case studies,’ documenting how they talked about other identities, namely, social class and religion. Because these were not part of the research questions, other participants might have had related experiences (i.e., about social class or religion), but we did not explore them in depth, so I do not attempt to place these narratives comparatively with the rest of the sample. Moreover, this chapter does not represent a comprehensive analysis of the lives of white gay man in areas outside of their race, gender, and sexual orientation identities.

Bob: Working Class Background

Bob was the only participant who talked at length about his experiences coming up in a working class community and the resulting tensions he felt at the University of Michigan and how these experiences intersected with his identities as white gay man. For Bob, experiences growing up as a gay man in a mostly white, working-class/poor rural community created tensions that: resulted in being caught in the middle of two ‘competing’ forms of oppression; made it difficult to feel accepted and comfortable among both LGBT and straight communities at the University of Michigan; and lead to thoughts of suicide as an adolescent, but also linked his gay identity to a transformative understanding of power and inequality.

Being a (white) gay man and from a working class community often felt at odds for Bob. He described how homophobia in his home community was enacted in very class-specific terms: “[At home,] homophobia sounds like class tension to me, that they really hate those uppity gays

who think they're better than anyone and have all the stuff, but complain about whatever." For Bob, hostility toward gay people was couched in specific terms of their affluence, as well as their already having a lot of things and not needing more. Presumably, these comments refer to people advocating for things like equality and justice for gay/LGBTQ communities. This hostility created a feeling of tension, as gay was viewed as both outside of his community and as intrinsically linked to affluence – two things that Bob was not. His experience of tension was not one-directional; he also talked about seeing LGBT movements turn that hostility around on his community of origin:

A lot of LGBT movements, I've kind of just found in my own experiences, have been hostile to especially working class people, people who may not have gone to college and learned you know, the right ways or the wrong ways of talking about issues ... I've seen working class people who are legitimately very interested in expanding their knowledge and in fighting for a lot of these issues, and social equality be really belittled by people.
(Bob)

In this case, the jargon of LGBT social justice movements is a barrier to those without access to specific forms of social justice education, even among people who were well-intentioned and interested in learning more and advocating with/for LGBT people. Bob's experience of tension around this issue serves as a reminder that some white gay men (in this case, white gay men with working-class ties) are also subjected to exclusion from the mainstream gay movement through a replication of identity-based power structures outside of race and gender.

While Bob took agency in this matter and actively sought out people from his working class community who were not anti-gay and people in his newly entered affluent community who were supportive of his gay identity and not hostile to working class communities, he was also compelled him to give up some connections. For instance, he mentioned that he does not speak to an entire side of his family who hold religiously based anti-gay beliefs. As well, living in the context of this tension contributed to him feeling like an outsider at the University of

Michigan, particularly among LGBTQ people who were culturally insensitive and hostile to working class people, values, and ways of being.

Bob discussed how this tension played out in his relationships at the University of Michigan, and talked about how the middle- and upper-class environment, which sees itself as accepting also carries distinct stereotypes of gay identity. This expectation prevented him from developing interpersonal relationships and the social capital that those relationships might have afforded. As he noted, the middle- and upper-class understanding of gay male identity carries certain expectations that he did not meet. Failing to meet these expectations often resulted in the termination of relationships:

When I come out it almost seems as though they expect me to be a certain person now, that my interests has changed, that something has changed about me, and usually once those expectations aren't met, the uh, relationship kind of falls apart. (Bob)

He further elaborated that those expectations were often couched in terms of consumption and the parlance of middle- and upper-class cultures. His identity as a gay man who did not meet certain expectations of what that meant led him to lose out on friendships and sources of support. Notably, the expectations of him and anti-gay bias he experienced in relationships that were lost post coming-out were also done in gender-specific terms. Straight women expected to take on an accessory role, and straight men that initially read him as another straight men were often hostile to his gay identity.

Further, he went on later to note the damage that these stereotypes had caused for his future prospects:

I don't know people here, so I can't really branch off of their networks or kind of get information about applying to business schools or whatever, there's just a large amount of social capital that I've missed out on that I think ties, at least in significant portion to my uh experiences as a gay man here. (Bob)

Because Bob comes from a working class background in another state, he had access to fewer resources and connections in a middle- and upper-class world (e.g., business schools); however, it was the intersection of his gay man and working-class identities that he identified as the main barrier to his upward mobility. As a gay man who was not willing to compromise himself based on the expectation of middle class and affluent straight coworkers, he lost out on the social capital that might have facilitated his upward mobility. While this tension was seen as a loss for his relationships and social connections, it was bittersweet in his own identity development.

The extreme isolation Bob felt as a gay man growing up led him to deep struggle and suicidal thoughts as an adolescent. However, he saw this experience as being generative in its own way, because it connected his gay identity to a larger structural understanding of oppression. Bob vividly described the experience of growing up in his hometown removed from any gay community or culture. However, in this context, he was able to overcome the feelings that had made him depressed and suicidal and used it as a point for a transformative critique of injustice as a whole:

I was extremely isolated ... for maybe seven years or so, and so that I didn't learn a lot of the things maybe that people tend to learn about what it means to be gay or what gay culture is like, and so I was able to kind of construct, you know, comparing it to my own inner turmoil and saying how eventually I overcame that and eventually how other people might feel the same thing whether it be on gay issues or race issues or whatever, that feeling of being devalued ... If I had known more about you know the different types of gay that there are expected to be, that I might not have reflected on what I've felt, I might have adopted a culture that was before me instead of essentially constructing my own.
(Bob)

He specifically pointed to how being multiply marginalized as a working class gay person led to extreme isolation, and how this allowed him to construct his own version of a gay identity that was more aligned with a vision for liberation rather than focusing strictly on identity politics, or fitting into a (homo)normative framework. In particular, he noted how his own reflection on his

experience led him to a greater appreciation and acknowledgment of the forms of marginalization experienced by people of Color. He went so far as to describe his hitting rock bottom as a positive development and suggested that gay communities can be constricting in that they embed certain scripts and contain dynamics that might prevent individuals from engaging in deep reflection that could lead to a critical political identity related to their marginal status.

Bob experienced gay identity and his working class roots as one of tension, and also one of possibility. Being upwardly mobile and at an elite University, Bob experienced this tension both between the community where he grew up, his gay identity, gay communities, and the affluent communities he entered into. While his marginalization along the lines of class are in some ways likely common to other upwardly mobile people at the University of Michigan – feeling left out, experiencing culture shock, having to manage and navigate relationships at home and at school, not identifying with the affluence of peers – the intersection of his gay identity and working class identity created a specific form of marginalization that also intersected with his identity as a man, given the specific expectations of (likely white) affluent straight women and men of him. This experience of multiple marginalizations was part of developing a vision of society and for society that sought to examine and dismantle power differentials along all of its axes, and affirmed his commitment to LGBT communities expanding their reach to include all of the intersections within, and to committing to multiple social justice movements and ideals that take on these axes of power in different ways. This vision was not limited to the identities through which he experienced multiple marginalizations either. As a white gay working class man, he was also committed to addressing racial inequality.

Bob's story also countered dominant narratives about coming out scripts. While the mainstream ideal places coming out as a moment that has culminated from years of self-

discovery that leads in a straight line toward greater self-acceptance and an eventual integrated gay identity, Bob's experiences of self-discovery were marked as political, rather than sexuality- or attraction-based, his experiences placed in the context of cultures and communities – and all of the exclusions that he faced therein. Rather than having interacting with LGBT communities as a positive influence of developing a gay identity, he viewed most of these communities as regressive spaces in terms of his values, sense of self, and participation in society. Moreover, he noted that his experiences of coming out did not get easier and easier, but rather, continued to be difficult points of negotiation and loss. Moreover his own personality, values, and presentation did not fit with others' expectations of white gay men, and he did not have access to the larger cultural perceptions that allow some white gay men to come out without saying it. That is, because of the mismatch between his own presentation and stereotypes of gay men, he was compelled to take on the additional emotional labor of continuously coming out.

Aaron: Religious (Catholic) Identity

Aaron's interview provided insight into the relationships between his religious and sexual identities, namely, being Catholic and a white gay man. While other respondents mentioned that they believed religion to be a root cause of the oppression of LGBT people or acknowledged that religious LGBT people face greater challenges, Aaron was the only who spoke at length and in depth about his personal experiences of being religious and a white gay man. For Aaron, it prompted him to question the impact of the gay rights movement and how it has served him, made it more difficult to find safe and productive spaces of support around his gay identity, and forced him to pit pieces of his identity against each other.

In discussing gay rights movements, Aaron acknowledged the benefits that have come disproportionately to white gay men as well as a number of the areas that these movements have

not addressed fully. In particular, he noted that these movements had failed him personally by not providing a more nuanced understanding of religion and sexuality. He said:

A lot of people, especially the people I've interacted with personally in my own life put it forward as an all or nothing, like either you're Catholic or you're gay, you're not both and so, working through that proved very difficult for me, and called into question how much the gay rights movement has actually done for me. (Aaron)

His experience of not feeling supported as gay and Catholic caused him to question the 'progress' afforded by LGBTQ movements. However, he also acknowledged that it is not the gay/LGBTQ organizations that are (solely) to blame for this tension. He said:

Religion feeds into oppression and oppression feeds into religion, back and forth, I think that religion is capable of a lot of really great and powerful things... it also maintains oppression and furthers the status quo, and so the more, the oppression of LGBT people can be questioned and oppression can be questioned more broadly, the more freely I'll be able to practice my own religion, my own religious beliefs, and be happy as somebody who identifies both as Catholic and as gay. (Aaron)

He defended his own experience with religion and its value while also acknowledging the role that religion has played in maintaining the subordination of LGBT people. However, as he sees the complexity of these dynamics, he frames the solution not just in terms of LGBTQ movement, religious communities, or even just to both, but rather to how "oppression can be questioned more broadly." Aaron, who talked about oppression with a nuanced understanding of intersectionality demonstrated that through his experience as a Catholic – hardly an oppressed identity in society writ large – pushed him to an understanding that no single issue, even one affecting him on a deeply personal level could be solved without an eye to understanding all forms of oppression.

In addition to interrogating the intersection of religion and sexuality on the level of movements and systems, he also discussed how the tension between Catholicism and his being gay negatively impacted his ability to find a supportive community. He mentioned that spaces

that attempt to focus on one identity in community tend to overlook the complexity of an individual. He pointed to Necto, the Spectrum Center, and an LGBT activist conference as each, in turn, attempting to reduce his identity. For Aaron, he was only able to find meaningful comfort and support in individual relationships and friendships. Particularly, he notes, that counter to what might be considered common and, indeed, counter to his own expectations, his Catholic community has been supportive around identities collectively than his gay community.

He said:

I'm most comfortable and most myself with Catholics, actually. Um, which is interesting, I think counter-intuitive to what I would've guessed or expected a few years ago... I think with my gay friends, they tend to accept that I'm Catholic, but ... they don't have express interest in talking about it... whereas I find that with my Catholic friends, they show a real interest in all parts of my identity, including my gay identity, like I can talk about, oh, this is who I'm dating right now, or this is what my sex life looks like right now, or this is how I'm feeling about the gay rights movement right now... I mean there's definitely some gay men that I feel like I can do that with, but not to the extent that I can with my Catholic friends. (Aaron)

Aaron was able to find Catholic friends and gay friends who were open and supportive to talking about relevant aspects of his identity, but had found that most often his Catholic friends tend to be more supportive and open in talking about 'the other' identity (i.e., his gayness), whereas his gay friends are more likely to just *tolerate* his Catholic identity but not go any deeper than that. This reality contradicts the larger idea that gay people automatically flock to safe spaces for their gay identity and find those to be the most rewarding, safe, and supportive.

While Aaron did mention finding supportive individuals among his Catholic community, he still emphasized the experiences of tension between his religious and sexual identities. Aaron talked about how this tension impacted him on the level of his own individual identity in feeling that he must choose a 'side' – gay or Catholic: "When I came out at first, it was, I'm gay, but I don't identify with gay men in general, and I want to follow the Catholic Church's teaching...

whenever I came out, that followed right after, was my Catholic identity is more important to me.” Notably, there was pressure to choose one identity or the other, something that might be unsurprising for someone coming up in a religious tradition that is openly opposed to gay sex and gay relationships; however, Aaron also implicitly spoke to how normative expectations around gay identity have marginalized his identity as gay and Catholic. He expanded on his explanation of coming out as a celibate gay Catholic by saying:

I personally definitely define that as coming out, but I recognize that in larger coming out narratives, that doesn’t fit a typical coming out narrative, necessarily, and so, I didn’t start coming out in the sense of “I’m gay, I wanna pursue a romantic relationship, I wanna identify with the gay male community,” until near the end of my freshman year of college. (Aaron)

As a gay Catholic, he defined his own coming out but since maintaining a religious identity is not necessarily part of normative scripts around gay identity, he assumed that others might not define that as coming out. In this way, his religious identity was diminished in the context of a gay identity, but perhaps more importantly, his identity as gay *and* religious is being marginalized within discourses of gayness.

Aaron’s discussion of his religious identity show that within dominant gay spaces, religious communities and institutions that are often ‘blamed’ for heterosexism and homophobia and while this blaming does not constitute the oppression of Christianity or Catholicism, taking a retributive stance toward religion only served to re-marginalize him as a religious-gay individual.

Summary: Future Explorations of Intersectionality among White Gay Men

Aaron’s and Bob’s identities and experiences both demonstrated, in very different ways, the intersections of identity-based exclusion in gay/LGBTQ spaces with anti-gay exclusion in their religious and working class communities, respectively. Aaron’s and Bob’s experiences of navigating multiple communities broadened their understandings and analyses, even when it

came with their marginalization and at financial, social, and psychic costs. Future explorations into the lives of white gay men should consider the role of multiple identities, particularly the possibility of how certain identities and communities might distance white gay men from homonormative politics, strategies, and notions of gay identity.

Chapter 9: Conclusions, Implications, and Reflection

Conclusions

Critiquing homonormative equality movements often feels like an uphill battle (Warner, 1999), particularly in the growing momentum of marriage equality wins in more and more states, and a pending decision by the Supreme Court of the United States on Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) and California's Proposition 8. Ongoing critiques, however, have sought to enhance, not detract from the goal of making the lives of LGBTQ and similarly identified people, while maintaining a constant vigilance as to how these movements marginalize and oppress multiply marginalized members of LGBTQ communities have been made by those who are excluded (Bailey et al., 2004; Cohen, 1997; Farrow, 2011). The findings herein document both how these dynamics are maintained and the potential negative impacts of these movements on those who are over-included, through a lens of race/gender privilege. While this is intellectually interesting in and of itself, I hope these findings can be used to greater allyhood within LGBTQ communities and develop an analysis of collective liberation and transformative resistance among white gay men (Bérubé, 2001; Edwards, 2006; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). While a few previous writings have examined the dynamics of academic and/or activist white gay men as white gay men (Bérubé, 2001; Halberstam, 2005), this project – to the best of my knowledge – is the first examination of the lives of white gay men who have grown up in the atmosphere of growing homonormative politics and support for the goals of these movements (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012).

Together, the findings of this study (see Figure 1) highlighted the importance of and impacts of participants' socialization into white man privilege (especially being socialized into white straight man privilege before coming out), the processes that served to contribute to

participation in homonormativity, and potential identity-based avenues for moving toward critical allyhood and resistance.

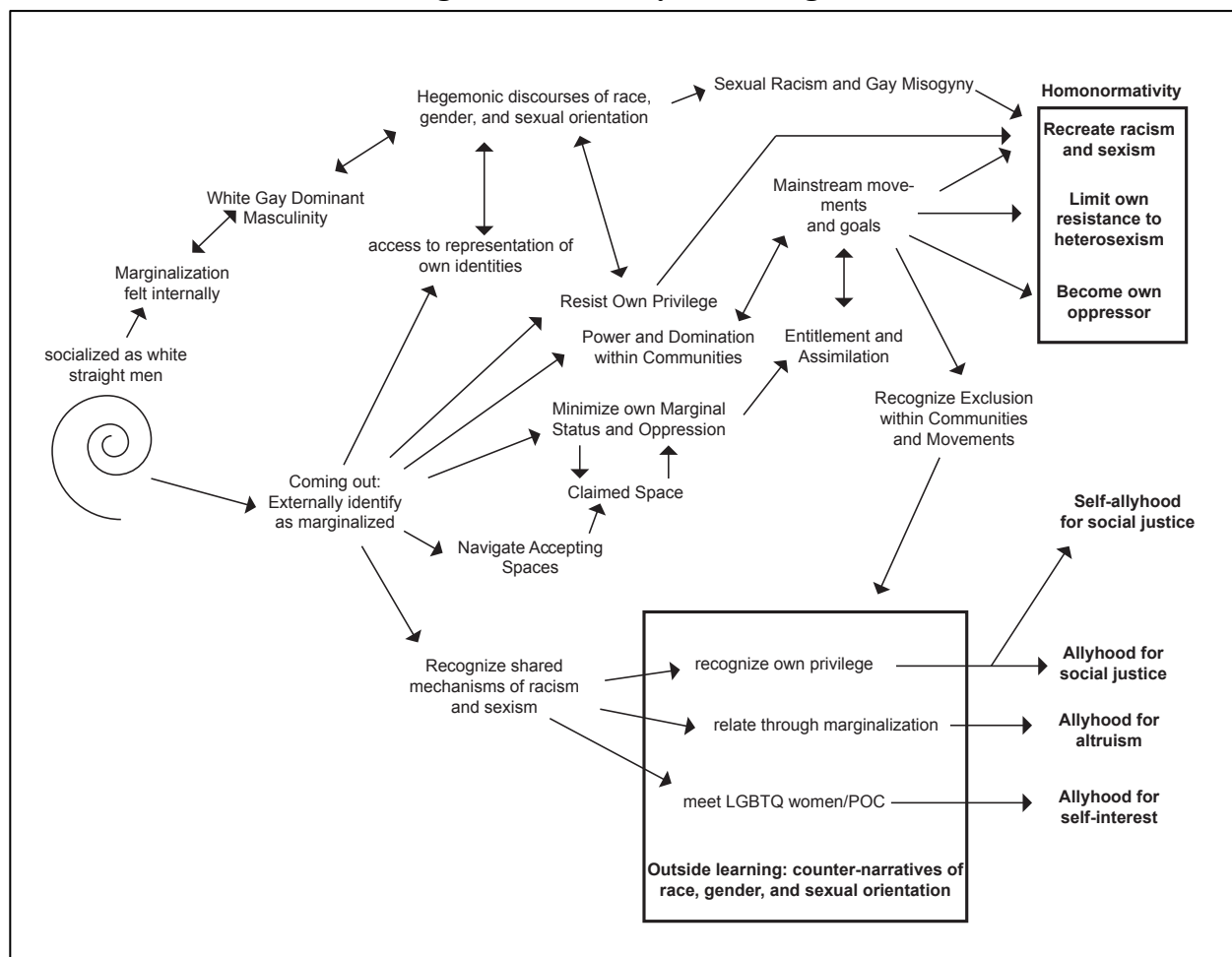
The persistent theme that white gay men's participation in racism and sexism can be shaped in reaction to marginalization as gay helps to further elucidate the mechanics of interdependent forms of oppression (Collins, 2000). While specific forms of gay-specific participation in racism and sexism emerged, these dynamics were not isomorphic to racism and sexism in dominant society. Indeed, in addition to being coded "gay," these reproductions of racism and sexism took on a particular nature that was sustained by the feelings and embodiment of marginalization as experienced through heterosexism.

Notably, while homonormativity can be used to describe some of the outcomes of participants' experiences, as seen in Figure 1, given the sedimentation of homonormativity in recent years, it also influenced and was bolstered by the processes throughout. That is, for instance, given the combination of white gay men's privilege as white/men, the production of 'claimed spaces' reflected the production of and the impact of homonormativity: because of the pervasive rhetoric of homonormativity, the idea of achieving at an elite university and succeeding in the neoliberal framework is alluring and becomes possible for white gay men; at the same time, the findings also demonstrated the experiences of fear and marginalization that prompt the production of homonormative desire and goals.

While issues of magnitude and frequency of phenomenon are not necessarily easily interpreted based on a qualitative study among a convenience sample, there is certainly a greater relative breadth of processes propelling homonormativity among white gay men (top half of Figure 1), as compared to the processes that participants engage in resistance and allyhood as critical forms of reflection and resistance (bottom half of Figure 1). In the (re)production of and

resistance to racism, sexism, and heterosexism, the lives of white gay men appear to be significantly entrenched in the pervasive influence of homonormativity.

Figure 1: Summary of Findings



While Lisa Duggan’s (2004) writing warned of the small but growing minority defining homonormative politics, it appears that homonormativity has become a defining context of how young white gay men, in particular at an elite university, relate to systems of oppression, our own identities, and the world around us. While the privileges associated with inclusion in the existing dominant institutions is alluring, as the process is built on entering into a further role as the oppressor, findings also demonstrate the ongoing damages arising from engaging in these processes. And, the long-term impacts might be to continue to damage our own spiritual and

emotional health and to continue to recreate a society that is built on separation and exploitation and not one built around justice, compassion, and care (Boggs, 2012).

Implications

The findings described above are both a cause for alarm and provide hope from which to cultivate justice and change. As the ongoing tendency for gay identity to become normalized (Warner, 1999) appears particularly strong in these communities (Bérubé, 2001; Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012), we must carefully interrogate the terms on which ‘acceptance’ is growing. While many participants described being relatively supported or tolerated among their family members and felt they had access to this University as a safe place (despite their own experiences of discrimination, and particularly despite Bob’s dissenting experiences), this acceptance within dominant-straight, white, masculinist institutions and communities appears to be breeding greater complacency among white gay men with these systems, and preventing us from seeing our own marginalization and oppression in critical terms, as well as our own privilege and power. However, there is a great sense of hope in these findings, as well. In particular, throughout, participants described the positive influence of coursework, organizational advocacy, and individual relationships, particularly with and about queer women/POC, which provided opportunities for participants to critically reflect on and resist their own white/man privilege. To capitalize on these policies, various strategies must be engaged to dismantle the privileges of white gay men, while also supporting their gay identity.

First, careful attention must be placed to how white gay men are educated in their own privilege. Conversations and relationships with others with a shared marginal identity are a useful starting place; however, the tendency of white men to resist our own privileges and the marginalization that can happen in compelling women/POC to educate white men about our own

privilege points to the need to develop structures to educate white gay men within their own privileged communities (Wernick, 2012) as white men. However, as white *gay* men, these strategies must be applied in tandem with and concurrent to supporting white gay men as marginalized. In particular, these strategies should focus not only on providing supportive communities and safe spaces, but also developing critical consciousness around and action toward addressing heterosexism (Currie, Mayberry, & Chenneville, 2012; Wernick et al., 2010).

Second, the collective fear and silence of white gay dominant masculinity provides a (perhaps overly) discouraging portrait of the lives of white gay men. Caught in a web of our own privilege and marginality, we end up participating in our marginalization in relationship to (white) straight men and limit our own capacity for openness and connection, particularly with other (white) men, not to mention women/POC. Given the pervasive structures of socialization that treat us as white straight men until we come out and still privilege us as white men after we come out, changes should be sought that not only build an expansive vision of justice and liberation that address policy changes, but also that focus on and built toward personal change that intentionally allows us to unlearn racism, sexism, and heterosexism, and relearn systems based on openness, compassion, and care (Social Justice Leadership, 2010).

Finally, in particular, as white gay men seek support based on identity, those avenues which provide support (both institutionally and personally/in community) should provide opportunities to learn about formations of homonormativity, race/gender privilege, and intentional practice. As participants described, any critical learning about race/gender, organizations, movements, and gay/LGBTQ politics often occurred *after* identity development around gayness. In these instances, aspects of white/man privilege and homonormativity likely become embedded into gay identity, and indeed, into white gay men's lives. Bob's story might

be particularly in illustrating the possibility regarding a shift from this. That is, in Bob's own estimation, isolation was productive insofar as it was isolation from a constrained (homonormative) gay culture, allowing him to develop a personal, political, and transformative political framework (Cohen, 1997; Social Justice Leadership, 2010).

Moreover, white gay men's productions and recreations of racism/sexism appear to happen most poignantly in *reaction* to marginalization. Practicing intentionality could be a useful strategy to limit the impacts of anti-gay marginalization on sustaining racism and sexism. Indeed, intentional practice has been argued to be a useful tool in general in combatting systems of oppression and privilege (Social Justice Leadership, 2010). For white gay men, in particular, and perhaps for many communities who are both marginalized and privileged, intentionality might be a particularly powerful way to combat the tendency to grasp at control and domination in reaction to feelings of powerlessness.

Reflection

Making critiques of mainstream movements as a young, single, white gay man is relatively easy for me; I can make claims forsaking the economic, social, physical, and political advantages of marriage, non-discrimination, military service, and hate crimes legislation with little direct immediate impact on my life. Others have certainly argued that in taking such a critical stance I am forsaking the needs of multiply marginalized communities (usually poor queer whites). But it seems oppressive in its own ways to assume that multiply marginalized communities' needs are best met by goals like gay marriage and non-discrimination protections. In the long-term, these goals will only recreate their subordination to and dependence on the state instead of adopting strategies that support sustainable community-based avenues of change (Kershner et al., 2007). Rather than relying on arguments that focus on the marginal benefits that

multiply marginalized communities will receive from the white-gay-male-centric goals of equality movements, we must look instead to centering the experiences of these communities in our work, starting at the margins and moving to the center.

Appendix

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Recruitment Materials

Email Message

Dear [Contact Name],

My name is Alex Kulick and I am working on an honors thesis project in Women's Studies that is examining the experiences of white gay men through the lens of race, gender, and sexual identity. I am looking for research participants to participate in interviews (45-75 minutes). Would you consider sending the following message to any relevant listservs you own, or in a regular newsletter? If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by responding to this email.

Thank you,
Alex Kulick

Recruitment message:

Do you identify as a white gay man? My name is Alex Kulick and I am working on a senior honors thesis project in Women's Studies on the experiences and identities of white gay men at the University of Michigan. This project will look at everyday experiences, identity, and citizenship through the lens of race, gender, and sexual identity. I am looking for participants in 45-70 minute sessions to talk about their experiences. To participate, you must be a white gay man between the ages of 18-25 and a current or recent University of Michigan student.

These interviews can be scheduled at your convenience, and will take place in a private location. No identifying information will be collected, and your name and anything you disclose will be kept confidential up to the limits of the law. To thank you for your time, you will receive a \$5 gift card to Espresso Royale or Starbucks (you choose!).

If you would like to participate, or if you have any questions, please email white.gay.men.study@gmail.com

Thank you,
Alex Kulick

Informed Consent

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

College-Aged White Gay Men: Intersectionality, Citizenship, and Identity

Principal Investigator: Alex Kulick, Undergraduate, Women's Studies, akulick@gmail.com, 734-223-9029 (cell)

Thesis Advisor: Prof. Victor Mendoza, PhD, English & Women's Studies, University of Michigan, vmendoza@umich.edu, 734-647-0772 (office)

Invitation to participate in a research study:

Alex Kulick invites you to participate in a research study about the experiences of white gay men at the University of Michigan. This study is part of a senior thesis project in Women's Studies examining the experiences of white gay men, their identities, and citizenship.

Description of your involvement:

You are invited to participate in an interview. These interview will last 45-75 minutes. The interview questions will ask about:

- Your experiences with your sexual identity, race, and gender
- Your understanding of citizenships
- Everyday experiences related to these issues

With your consent, the interview will be audio recorded. The audio recording will be saved in a secure location, transcribed, and destroyed following transcription. When the interview is being transcribing all identifying information, like names and locations will be removed.

Benefits & Compensation:

For your participation, you will be offered a \$5 gift card to Espresso Royale or Starbucks. You may choose to receive one of these two options or neither.

You may experience other benefits from participating in the study. The interview format will prompt reflection and may provide an opportunity to learn more about your experiences and how your identities will affect you.

Risks:

The study shall pose no more than minimal risk to you. Given that all identifying information will be removed from the data, there is a very unlikely risk that your identity will be discovered and you may be inadvertently "outed." You will not be quoted in any publications or manuscripts unless the quotation is short and anonymous enough that it could not be linked to you.

The interview will ask questions about your experiences and identities. You may experience some discomfort discussing some of these issues. While efforts have been taken to remove any potential damaging questions from arising, there is a small risk that you may experience discomfort. If at any point during the interview, you do not want to answer a question, you may do so. If you feel that you need to take a break, or would like to end the interview at any time,

please feel free to do so. There are no negative consequences for doing so. You will still be eligible for the \$5 gift card.

I will also provide a list of resources that you can take with you if you experience any discomfort after the interview is over, or you feel you need to seek out additional help. These resources are all free for University of Michigan students.

Confidentiality:

The results of this study will be published as my senior honors thesis, and may be published in future reports or academic publications. To ensure your confidentiality, the only data that will be stored will not have your name attached to it.

Pseudonyms:

You will be assigned a pseudonym for reports of the results of the data. If you would like, you may choose your own pseudonym. If you have no preference, one will be selected for you.

Storage and future use of data:

After the completion of transcription, all data that has names or other identifying information associated with it will be destroyed. The transcripts themselves will be stored electronically in a secure server that is password protected, and the password is only known to me.

The data may be stored for up to 5 (five) years following the completion of the study for use in later publications, but will be stored securely and only accessible by me. If you would like your data to be stored prior to that date, please let me know, either now or in the future.

Voluntary nature of the study and withdrawing from the study:

The study is completely voluntary, and there are no negative consequences from withdrawing from the study. If at any point in time, you would like to withdraw from the study, you may inform me in writing, by email, or over the phone. Please see my contact information below. If you would like to withdraw your data from this study after the interviews are complete, you may do so. All transcripts, audio recordings, and notes associated with your interviews will be permanently deleted and not used in any future publications.

Future Correspondence:

You may elect to receive updates on any publications that come from this project, including my final senior honors thesis. This information will be kept separate from the data and your interview.

Contact information:

Alex Kulick
phone: (734) 223-9029 – cell
email: akulick@gmail.com

You may also contact my advisor:
Victor Mendoza, PhD
Phone: (734) 647-0772 – office
email: vmendoza@umich.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the University of Michigan Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board, 540 E Liberty St., Ste 202, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2210, [\(734\) 936-0933](tel:7349360933) [or toll free, [\(866\) 936-0933](tel:8669360933)], irbhsbs@umich.edu

Consent:

By checking this box, you are agreeing that to participate in this study, that you have read and understand the above informed consent document, and that your interview may be audio recorded.

- I agree to participate in the study*
- I agree to have my interview audio-recorded*

If you would like to receive email updates about the project, please list your email here:

As a reminder, this email address will be kept separate from all data.

List of Resources for Participants

GLBT National Help Center:

“The GLBT National Youth Talkline provides telephone and email peer-counseling, as well as factual information and local resources for cities and towns across the United States. All of our services are free and confidential.”

HOURS:

Monday thru Friday from 1pm to 9pm, pacific time
(Monday thru Friday from 4pm to midnight, eastern time)

Saturday from 9am to 2pm, pacific time
(Saturday from noon to 5pm, eastern time)

Email: youth@GLBTNationalHelpCenter.org

Spectrum Center

“With sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression as our framework, the Spectrum Center is committed to enriching the campus experience and developing students as individuals and as members of communities. Our work is accomplished through student-centered education, outreach, advocacy and support.”

Phone: 734-763-4186

Address: 3200 Michigan Union, 530 South State Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48109

Hours: Monday-Friday, 9:00am-6:00pm. (9-5 during the summer)

E-mail: spectrumcenter@umich.edu

Web: <http://spectrumcenter.umich.edu>

Counseling and Psychological Services

“Counseling and Psychological Services is committed to creating an environment based on our values of multicultural, multi-disciplinary and multi-theoretical practices that allow our diverse student body to access care, receive high quality services and take positive pathways to mental health. We also strive to find creative ways of reaching out to students and the UM community to nurture and develop a proactive, renewed sense of engagement throughout the campus.”

Phone: 734-764-8312

Address: CAPS is centrally located on the third floor of the Michigan Union (3100)

Hours: Fall/Winter: Mon-Thurs 8AM-7PM Fri 8AM-5PM

Urgent/Crisis Services: Fall/Winter: Mon-Thurs 10AM-6PM Fri 10AM-4:00PM

Email: tdsevig@umich.edu

Web: <http://caps.umich.edu>

Interview Protocol

As stated in the informed consent, this study is looking at the experiences of white gay men. I am interviewing men to get a broad sense of their experiences and how they understand the world. As a reminder, if you ever want to take a break, end the interview, or withdraw from the study, please let me know. There are no negative consequences for doing so.

1. I'll be using pseudonyms to identify participants in my thesis and any publications. Do you have a pseudonym you would like me to use? If not, I will assign one to you.
2. To thank you for your participation in this study, I will provide a gift card to Espresso Royale or Starbucks. Do you have a preference?
3. Where are you from? What's your major? What do you want to do with your life?
4. The first question is about gay movements and LGBTQ movements, so it would be helpful to hear how you understand and define these movements.
5. Thinking about these movements, broadly defined, do you think they have had an impact on your day-to-day life?
 - a. What do you think the goals of these movements should be for the community as a whole?
 - b. Thinking about yourself as a gay person, and what you need, what do you think that movements can accomplish to make your life better?
6. Can you talk about a time you felt discriminated against for being gay?
 - a. Can you talk specifically about a time that this happened on campus?
 - b. How did it make you feel? What did you do about it?
7. ***This next question is similar to the last one, but slightly different. Do you ever feel embarrassed by being gay, or that you need to hide it?
 - a. What in that situation made you feel that way?
8. ***On the flip side of the last two questions, when do you feel most supported and able to express yourself as a gay man?
9. Is being gay a major part of how you define yourself as a person? Has this changed over time?
10. ***Do you spend time in gay-identified or LGBT-identified spaces?
 - a. What was it like the first time you entered a space like that?
 - b. How do you feel about those spaces now?

11. Do you feel that being gay connects you to other groups that are discriminated against/treated unfairly? How? Or why not?
12. ***What messages have you received about being White?
 - a. Do you think you fit into those?
13. In what circumstances do you think most about being White?
14. Do you think being White shapes your identity as a gay man?
15. ***What messages have you received about what it means to be a man?
 - a. How have those been specific to you as a gay man? As a white man?
 - b. How do you feel you fit or do not fit into those messages?
16. Has being gay affected your relationships with women?
 - a. Can you talk about a time when you thought about being a gay man with straight female friends?
17. Are there responsibilities that come with being a man? What are they?
 - a. Are there responsibilities that society dictates? What are they?
 - b. Are there responsibilities that you feel that might not be a part of what society tells you to do?
18. ***Do you think that femininity is a major part of your life and how you see yourself?
 - a. Can you talk about a time when you felt feminine?
19. In concluding, I am giving all of the participants a chance to answer the question of what it means to be a white gay man. While this is a large question that I am attempting to do an entire research project on, do you think there are some main things that you would like mention? What are the first few things that come to mind?
20. Is there anything you would like to add or questions you have for me?

*** Main questions