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Communicating Queer Identities Through Personal Narrative and Intersectional Reflexivity

Richard G. Jones, Jr.
University of Denver

COMMUNICATING QUEER IDENTITIES THROUGH PERSONAL NARRATIVE

AND INTERSECTIONAL REFLEXIVITY

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Richard G. Jones, Jr.

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Advisor: Dr. Bernadette Marie Calafell

Author: Richard G. Jones, Jr.
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ABSTRACT

There is currently a lack of intersubjective research involving human participants and conceptual frameworks that include queer theory. Queer theory's poststructuralist epistemology tends toward desubjectification, problematizing research that relies on participants' self-reports of lived experience. The author proposes that the interdisciplinary nature of Communication Studies, which is situated within the humanities and social sciences, leaves communication scholars well poised to contribute to ongoing metatheoretical and metamethodological conversations regarding queer theory and intersubjective research, particularly in relation to cultures and identities. To contribute to this scholarly conversation, the author utilizes the deconstructionist lens of queer theory to contextualize communication, employs personal narrative as methodology informed by the performance paradigm, and co-constructs personal narratives with five queer-identified men in order to explore queer identity in lived experience. While queer theory's anti-essentialist philosophy has been explored and tested through textual analysis, queer scholars have rarely attempted to triangulate their assessment of the heuristic value of queer theory with the lived experiences of people who identify as queer. More specifically, the purpose of this dissertation is to explore how queer men experience their identities in relation to their bodies and personal politics, and how queer men contribute to and contest representations of gay male bodies in popular discourses and gay rights issues in political discourses. Additionally, the author

operationalizes *intersectional reflexivity* as a paramethodological and political commitment throughout the research process. The following themes emerged from the narrative analysis: (1) queer men experience their identities in intersectional and reflexive ways, (2) queer men experience their bodies in relation to narrow and idealized representations of gay male bodies, and attempt to internalize and promote body positivity, (3) queer men espouse political commitments to social justice and coalitional activism that extend beyond legislative activism, (4) queerness in lived experience does not demonstrate the seamless anti-essentialist philosophy of queer theory in that queer men must negotiate ideological tensions grounded in daily practice, (5) experiences of incongruency within various identities leads queer men to develop a queer consciousness that is inherently intersectional and reflexive and creates spaces of possibility for coalitional activism. The narratives are presented using performative writing that captures the vocal and emotional qualities of the spoken words and creates dialogic spaces in which the voices and experiences of queer men become more public, validated, and supported across communities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: COMMUNICATING CONTEXT

The current conversation regarding gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer

(GLBTQ)[1] people in the U.S. is political, social, historical, and personal; and this

conversation extends from popular discourse to scholarly disciplines. In this dissertation,

I bring those conversations together, paying particular attention to queer as an identity

category[2], in a way that increases the presence of queer voices in Communication Studies

and productively pairs queer theory and identity theories with personal narrative. I use the

identity label *queer* as a label distinct from *gay*. While *queer* is sometimes used as an

umbrella term or shorthand for GLBT people, I am not conflating or using the terms

interchangeably. Instead, I draw on Gamson's ("Sexualities") conceptualization of queer

as a perspective that opposes established social and academic norms, critiques

assimilationist and binary views of sexuality and identity, and questions identity politics.

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[1] The acronymic choices I, and others, make to represent sexual minorities are always political. While I occasionally use GLBTQ to refer to diverse groups of sexual minorities, this acronym is problematic because it simultaneously implies inclusion by virtue of their grouping and division, given the distinctions maintained within the grouping—neither of which effectively communicate information about these groups as a whole or individually. First, of the groups in the acronym, gays and lesbians are the most visible in popular, political, and scholarly discourses, which leaves bisexual, transgender, and queer individuals at the margins. Second, transgender identities are more relevant to gender than sexual orientation, and queer can apply to all the other groups in the acronym, and queer refers to more than sexual orientation. Therefore, I strategically use specific categorical labels that are most relevant to my discussion in order to mitigate some of these problematics.

[2] While queerness as a theoretical concept is in tension with the concept of identity (Gamson, "Sexualities"), I approach identities as active and processual rather than as fixed, unified, or stable. I expand on the discussion of queer theory and identity in Chapter Two.

From this perspective, *queer* is more likely to deconstruct labels like gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender rather than unite and essentialize them. Additionally, the perspective I take in this dissertation is grounded in Human Communication Studies[3], uses qualitative and performance-based methods to explore queer identity, and uses queer theory to inform the context surrounding the study.

This dissertation also reflects my scholarly commitments to critical cultural research that is action-oriented, intersectional, and self-reflexive. Sharing and analyzing personal narratives can be a powerful and therapeutic process; for example, in unpacking intersections of identities such as sexuality and gender, and interrogating the privileges and disadvantages that accompany our identities and impact our lives (A. Fisher). In the remainder of this chapter, I share my investment in this research through my personal narrative, and introduce a discussion of queer studies in Communication Studies and overview the contributions of this project. Next, I historically and politically contextualize homosexual male bodies within modernity and explain why this history is important to contemporary gay and queer identities.

In Chapter Two, I briefly outline queer theory and then offer a comprehensive review of queer studies in Communication Studies. Then, I review the contested terrain between queer theory and identity, outline some relevant critiques of queer theory, and,

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[3] I use Communication Studies to refer to the general professional field that privileges communication as the focal point of inquiry and Human Communication Studies to distinguish a branch of Communication Studies that focuses on human produced communicative texts and talk from Mass Communication Studies which focuses more on media studies and production, journalism, advertising, and public relations. By distinguishing between these terms I am able to more precisely direct my research toward relevant scholarly conversations within Communication. Although I locate my scholarship primarily within Human Communication Studies, I do not view these sub-fields as mutually exclusive and acknowledge the versatility of communication and queer theory to span sub-disciplinary borders. I use Human Communication Studies when offering conclusions of commentary more relevant to my sub-field and Communication Studies when referring to the Discipline in general.

finally, explain how my research bridges this contested terrain. Finally, I present my research questions. In Chapter Three, I overview the performance paradigm and personal narrative as theory and method. I focus on how personal narratives can be used by marginalized groups to "talk back" to power and on the potential of connecting personal narrative, performativity, and queer theory. Then, I discuss intersectional reflexivity as a paramethodological component of my research. I conclude this chapter with an overview of the research procedures. In Chapter Four, I present the narrative analysis by introducing the research participants with their own narratives regarding their day-to-day experiences of queerness and maleness. I then discuss how queer identity relates to views of the body and politics and how my participants' queer identities contest and reproduce mainstream representations of gay bodies and gay politics. I conclude this chapter by theorizing connections among intersectional reflexivity, queer consciousness, and coalitional activism in relation to queer identities. In Chapter Five, I offer conclusions regarding my guiding research questions, discuss implications of my project, note limitations and directions for future research, and close with personal ruminations on the importance of critically reflexive scholarship and activism.

<div align="center">Personal Investment: My Journey to Queer</div>

My personal and academic lives have never been distinct,
and I'm sure they're probably not for most.
My journey,
to and *through* the academy,
has largely been about trying to make sense
out of the *mess* of identities going on inside of me.
Growing up in a
lower working class family,
in the Appalachian Mountains of Western North Carolina,
didn't afford me much space to nurture the
"non-normative" feelings

I had inside me.
Feelings that often exhibited themselves
in *outward* actions
that were met with unfriendly responses.

As a young boy,
my nerdiness,
and undeniable lack of athleticism
(much less the desire to feign an interest in it),
and constant failed performances of masculinity,
left me out of touch with my male relatives and schoolmates.
My desire to sit with the Black kids
on our voluntarily segregated school bus,
instead of the rednecks I was *expected* to identify with,
was met with physical and verbal violence,
as the other kids pushed me off the bus and yelled
"Nigger lover!"
at me as I walked up my driveway.
Later,
my burgeoning sexuality
was policed and surveilled by those around me,
and I quickly learned that my
"different" desires
were *not* going to be tolerated.
…Even at this early age,
while the people around me *pleaded* with me,
or tried to threaten or bully me into
"fitting in" or "changing,"
I held fast to the notion that it was not *me* that needed to change—
but *them*.

My general dissociation with my peers
left me to my own devices
and my intellectual curiosity led me to the public library,
which started my journey to becoming an academic,
or as I might label myself,
an "organic intellectual."
Around the age of twelve,
I started taking the bus to the library after school,
where I stayed until my mom picked me up on her way home from work.
Afraid that a librarian,
or library patron,
would see my reading material and *discipline* me in some way,
I discreetly did research on sexuality, gender, and race—

interspersed with more "age appropriate" science fiction reading—
for many years.

Fast forward to my first year of college…
My first year of freedom
from the stifling provinciality of Western North Carolina.
Years of covertly conducting research,
of *trying* to make sense out of my identities,
had built up a lot of tension and emotion.
So,
in my first semester of college,
in an honors psychology class,
when I *finally* got the chance to write a legitimate research paper…
on anything I wanted…
I titled my paper:
"Discrimination Against Homosexuals!"
…I let out a lot of stress through my typing fingers,
something I *still* do today.

Later,
in my communication theory class,
I wrote about gay men as a speech community
and continued,
in classes,
to write about other aspects of culture including international issues,
race relations,
and gender identity.

Even as a novice academic
in the *one* public library in my small rural county,
I was able to make *sense* out of my experiences
through reading,
through scholarship,
and through theory.
It wasn't until graduate school that I was exposed to queer theory.
I was immediately attracted to its
postmodern,
 and cerebral
challenges to my ways of thinking.
Through my readings,
I began to see that some of the critiques *I* had
of my *own* gay identity,
and gay culture in general,
were echoed in and validated by queer theory.

Things like political apathy,
assimilationist rhetoric,
and commercialization.

When I entered my doctoral program,
I decided to explicitly change my identification from *gay* to *queer*.
As a result,
I experienced some negative backlash from community members,
and some of my friends.
One friend suggested that my education had made me think
I was "better" than everyone,
and that identifying as queer was a
pretentious move to get attention.
Other friends became non-communicative,
defensive,
or even hostile,
when I suggested we talk about some of the ways in which
racism, classism, and misogyny
are perpetuated and even *tolerated* within mainstream gay male culture,
or when I suggested that political causes
such as gay marriage, gay adoption, and gays in the military
were *largely* assimilationist rather than revolutionary.
…I realize now
that I was coming into my own
as a critical thinker and critical scholar.

Intellectually,
it was intriguing and satisfying.
Emotionally,
it was like a second coming out.

Again,
like I had done in the library of my small town,
and in my undergraduate classes,
I turned to research to try to learn more,
and make sense of my *new* mess of identities.
…I had gotten a little too comfortable,
too complacent,
as a gay man,
and was now thrown back into a space of
liminality and messiness—
a space that I love
because it's creative and dynamic
…but a space that has also been uncomfortable and lonely.

I wanted stories about the *complexity* of queer identities in lived experience.
Complexity that includes
race, ethnicity, nationality, class, gender, age, and ability.
While I drew inspiration from existing scholarship
in gay and lesbian studies
and works by lesbians of color,
I wanted to hear the stories of other queer men.
I felt…
within myself,
a *longing* to be around,
to learn from,
and to *communicate* with other queer men.
Driven by a desire to learn more about my own queer identity,
and how others experience queerness,
I am now at a new point in my scholarly journey.
A point where *I* can share the narratives I've collected…
so *you* can hear the voices,
and share in the experiences of queer men.

I include my narrative here in order to convey my personal investment in the research I

present and to disclose some of my positionality. My personal narrative frames the

dissertation as a whole by narrating the motivations for my research here, and reflecting

on the research process in Chapter Five.

<div align="center">Scholarly Conversation, Scope, and Contribution</div>

While there is a tradition of gay and lesbian studies within Communication

Studies dating back more than 25 years (Chesebro; Ringer), Communication Studies has

been slower than other fields to adopt or include queer research perspectives (Yep,

Lovaas, and Elia, "Introduction" 3).[4] A comprehensive review of queer studies in

communication is included in Chapter Two, but Yep, Lovaas, and Elia's recent edited

volume *Queer Theory and Communication*, represents the cutting edge of queer

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[4] Gay and lesbian studies and queer studies are two distinct fields that are sometimes complementary and sometimes in conflict. I situate my project within queer studies. For a thorough treatment of this debate see Lovaas, Elia, and Yep's 2006 edited volume *LGBT Studies and Queer Theory: New Conflicts, Collaborations, and Contested Terrains*.

communication studies and has done much to push the scholarly conversation forward.

But in this volume, and in general, there is still a lack of queer theory used in conjunction

with intersubjective research.[5] My dissertation project aims to contribute to this ongoing

scholarly conversation by bridging seemingly disparate theoretical and methodological

terrain regarding queer theory and identity. Through the use of performance-based

methods, I explore queer identity in ways that contribute to the growing sub-field of

queer communication studies. Furthermore, my project focuses on intersections of

identities including sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, gender, and ability, which contributes

to the field's understanding of culture and communication.

This research has higher stakes beyond contributing to scholarly conversations or

creating a robust research agenda. The stakes in research with and advocacy for

marginalized people is not only in terms of producing monographs or speaking *for* them.[6]

Speaking to marginalized people from a cautious and reflexive research frame about their

embodied experiences of their identities creates the potential to validate and give public

voice to underrepresented experiences in ways that may be empowering and

transformative for researcher, participant, and audience.

Although I believe all marginalized groups deserve scholarly attention and public

advocacy, I chose to focus on collecting personal narratives from people who identify as

queer and male. I consciously made this choice because of the important role my own

experiences as a queer-identified male play in the relationship between my academic and

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[5] I conceptualize intersubjective research as research that involves communicating with living, human research participants.

[6] Drawing on the influential work of Alcoff ("Problem"), I will be reflexive about my privileged positionality as researcher and work to speak *with* my research participants rather than speaking *for* them.

personal lives. I also frame my project within a historicization of the ways in which homosexual male bodies have been "othered," a history that is in most cases distinct from histories of homosexual female bodies.

In this research project, I aim to make theoretical *and* methodological contributions to queer communication studies by exploring the embodied identities of queer men through personal narrative. The contributions I aim to make in terms of theory include addressing critiques that queer studies does not explore "real world" experiences of queer people (Gamson, "Reflections", "Sexualities"; Heinz) in intersectional ways (Cohen; Johnson, "Quare"; R. Smith). The contributions I aim to make in terms of methodology include pairing queer theory with intersubjective uses of personal narrative and operationalizing a new paramethodological concept I term *intersectional reflexivity*. I now turn to a discussion of the historical, political, and social contexts that inform my research.

Conceptualizing and Queering Homosexual Bodies

In this section, I conceptualize key terms guiding my project and outline a history of the construction of homosexual bodies and how they have been "othered." I then overlay the historical context with a queer theoretical perspective to explore how contemporary identities are influenced by this history, which reflects my commitment to coupling cultural critique with historicization. My aim is to communicate suggestive intellectual links between the historical and contemporary that add complexity to our current understanding of the sexualized subject, not to posit causal links. Through the theoretical lens of performativity, we know the body is connected to historical narratives: "As an intentionally organized materiality, the body is always an embodying *of*

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possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention. In other words, the body *is* a historical situation…" (Judith Butler, "Performative Acts" 521). Here, Butler claims a central tenet of critical cultural studies: that contemporary context cannot be divorced from historical context, as contemporary identities draw upon historical iterations and sedimentations of meaning (Judith Butler, *Undoing*; Hall, "Who Needs"). Since my project emerges from an articulation of communication, subjectivity, and identity, it is important to ground my research in the vocabulary of critical cultural studies. Therefore, I utilize concepts such as representation, discourse, subject, subjectivity, and identity.

I employ the constructivist approach to meaning in language by focusing on representation and discourse. Hall ("West"), drawing on Foucault (*Archaeology*), defines discourse as "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about— i.e., a way of representing—a particular kind of knowledge about a topic….Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language" (291). It is through discourse that representations are created and meaning is generated within the signifying practices that constitute discourses. In short, meaning is mediated through discourse and it is through discourses and representations that we make sense of and construct our "reality." Dominant discourses create dominant representations that lead people to a particular and preferred meaning. For example, if gay male bodies are cast as hypersexual deviants by dominant discourses, these notions will appear in representations of gay male bodies. Contemporary representations and discourses also draw upon historical narratives, as discourses are historically and socially contextual. Therefore, through discourse, I can

relate the historicization I offer below to the subjective experiences of queer men as told through the personal narratives I present in Chapter Four.

I situate my use of "subject" within ongoing conversations in cultural studies. Namely, I connect to early theorists'—Benveniste and Lacan—discussion of the intimate connection between language and subjectivity (Silverman 18). In other words, subject positions are not pre-linguistic, as they are given discursive space through language. Then, people find identification within particular subject positions by avowing them or not. Additionally, one can label or ascribe a subject position to someone else. For example, if someone yells "faggot" at a man walking down the street, then that man, even if only for an instant, may occupy the subject position of faggot in the eyes of passersby, whether he identifies as homosexual or not. This example illustrates the powerful connections between spoken language and subject positions, which make particular actions or ways of being comprehendible. To further illustrate, while homosexual sex acts may have been performed as long as humans have existed, the socio-cultural marker *gay*—or, later, *queer*—was not possible without a discursive naissance.

The notion of subject positions has been critiqued by Judith Butler (*Undoing*) and Hall ("Who Needs") for being too rigidly connected to individualism of the Enlightenment that purports people to be self-contained, self-knowing individuals with free will. In sum, these critics claim we do not simply "choose" to occupy or not occupy a particular subject position, because our realities are constructed and choices made in relation to dominant discourses and ideologies.

Althusser connects interpellation and ideology, or "the system of ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man [woman] or a social group" (149).

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Althusser positions the subject, not as a transcendental executor of free will, but as an entity acted upon when ideology approaches, or hails, us in familiar ways. Familiarity, as such, may lead subjects to say, "That's obvious! That's right! That's true!" (161), increasing the likelihood of identification. However, Paul Smith critiques the Althusserian subject, proposing a more complex view of subjectivity in which the subject is the effect of a "continuing series of overlapping subject-positions which may or may not be present to consciousness at any given moment" (32). Acknowledging multiple and overlapping subjectivities opens a space for agency. Silverman argues that subjects build a repertoire of contestation as they come face-to-face with different interpellations. This repertoire of contestation builds and subjects are able to create and find identification with an "oppositional ideology," which allows them to identify and control ideology, while still "speaking in, and from within" dominant ideology (Sandoval 43-44). These theorists extend Althusser's influential theories of ideology and interpellation by acknowledging the "heterogeneity of conflicting ideologies concealed behind the dominant one" (Silverman 31) and theorizing the possibility for agency and contestation while not presuming the subject exists in a space outside of ideology, but always in relation to it.

Hall, in particular, adds levels of complexity to identity and *subjectivity*, which at this point, becomes a more fitting concept for my research than "subject position." Hall also expands on theories of ideology and interpellation in relation to theories of identity, while continuing to acknowledge that multiple subjectivities exist, which hail, or interpellate people into identification with them ("Who Needs"). Ideological influences make some subjectivities more visible than others, and as particular subjectivities attract

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more identification, they become more visible and legitimate, eventually becoming socio-culturally recognizable identities. For example, in a heterosexist society, subjectivities that validate heterosexuality will likely interpellate people into identification, while messages that present homosexuality as a viable subjectivity are not as present or visible within dominant discourses. In short, the sedimentation of subjectivities over time creates socially recognizable and legible identities. However, there is an important theoretical distinction between subjectivities and identities that is especially germane to my research. Alcoff (*Visible*) coveys this distinction well: "The concept of identity in everyday usage, much more so than subjectivity or even the self, implies a recognition of bodily difference. We can imagine subjectivity as mind or imagination, merely mental, and thus as transcending its necessary physical base" (102). While Alcoff acknowledges the importance of subjectivities as discursive formations, she also notes that "social identities cannot be adequately analyzed without attentiveness to the role of the body and of the body's visible identity" (102). As I outline in Chapter Two, materiality is an important part of identities, and an important part of social theorizing that has been under-examined in queer theory. While I return to the discussion of theories of identity, especially in relation to queer theory, in the next chapter, the significance of the body informs the remainder of this chapter, which adheres to Alcoff's claim that "identities need to be contextualized and processes of identity formation need to be historicized" (85). The relationship between identities and history is also supported by Hall who defines identities as "names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past" ("Cultural Identity" 225). Following Alcoff and Hall's recommendations, I offer a historicization and contextualization of

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homosexual male bodies, focusing on the ways in which it has been discursively and materially othered.

It may be difficult or even traumatic for people who do not identify as heterosexual to have their identities validated. Judith Butler may claim these particular subjects' identities are illegible and unintelligible (*Undoing*) in dominant society, while Hall may call them cultural "others" ("Spectacle"). The notion of othering can be thought of as the side-effect, intentional or otherwise, of the process of being systematically left out of or oppressed by dominant discourses with which one is not able to find identification. While being othered is a process of epistemic violence, people are not without agency in Hall's theory of identity and subjectivity ("Who Needs"). In the moment of interpellation, one may have the ability to contest or subvert a particular subject position through what Rowe calls resistive hailing or what Sandoval calls reverse interpellation ("Be Longing" 16). For example, in my analysis, I discuss how queer identities contests gay identities. Contestation is never wholesale or complete however, as exercising agency often means negotiating a tension between contesting and reproducing, and balancing history with present. Alcoff (*Visible*) conveys this point in the following:

> It is not that a historical narrative operates as a macroforce imposing its will on the individual; rather, it lives through individuals who interpret it and operationalize it into a set of social practices. Individuals have agency over interpretations of their history but they cannot "choose" to live outside history any more than they can "overcome" their horizon. (114-115)

So, while we have agency in the process of interpellation and identification, we are never outside ideology. While my participants, in Chapter Four, articulate queer identities that subvert and contest mainstream identities, they narrate their identities in relation to

dominant discourses regarding sexuality, bodies, and politics, and in relation to the history of othering outlined below.

Historicizing homosexual bodies involves some linguistic sophistication in order to effectively capture historical, political, and social changes that have taken place. As I discuss more below, the labels for heterosexual and homosexual were created around the same time; therefore, it is erroneous to try to speak about heterosexual or homosexual subjects before the creation of those linguistic markers. This should not be misinterpreted to mean that heterosexual and homosexual sex acts or relationships were not taking place before this time, as indeed they were. However, those sexual acts did not carry the same meaning as they did once the acts' discursive marker was created. In this historical tracing, I begin by using *homosexual*, which emerged as a clinical term to specifically describe "deviant" sex acts and simultaneously, by default, necessitated the creation of the label *heterosexual* (Katz, *Invention*). While homosexual is a clinical label, I use it to convey the important historical relationship between science and othering. In regards to labeling, the point of distinction most important to this project is the difference between *gay* and *queer*. I conceptualize *gay* as a 20th century avowed identity label for males that demarcates sexual orientation toward the same-sex and also carries with it cultural connotations of an identity-marker. I use *homosexual* when discussing historical context and othering and *gay* when referring to contemporary representations of gay male bodies or to the gay rights movement. I conceptualize *queer* as a distinct identity from gay that emerged in the 1990s and demarcates a sexual orientation that is non-normative (as

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related to heterosexuality) but is not necessarily homosexual.[7] Furthermore, I

conceptualize *queer* as a more politicized identity than gay in which dominant social

structures including, but not limited to, gender and sexuality are interrogated. A

politicized queer identity also critiques mainstream gay and lesbian communities, which

in many cases colludes with dominant power structures by seeking assimilation into an

unchanged system.[8]

 As I outline below, cultural, social, and political changes in recent centuries

created new ways to talk about sexuality, which led to the construction of sexual subjects

and to new identity labels. With these new constructions came binaries that positioned

some sexual subjects as others. As Hall ("Spectacle") notes, cultural others exist in and

through their difference from the dominant, as the two are mutually constituted (234-

235). Therefore, the framing of homosexual subjects as "other" occurs at the same time

as the creation of the heterosexual subject, neither of which existed as discursive identity

markers before late-modernity.

<div align="center">(B)Othered by Modernity</div>

 How homosexual bodies have been "othered" in history is part of a larger

narrative of the modernist project. I focus my contextualization of homosexual male

bodies within modernity while being critical of the modernist project, which has socially

stratified people based on differences that privilege white, Western, heterosexual, able-

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[7] In Chapter Four my participants reference the confining sexuality of the label *gay* as one of their reasons for identifying as queer. Queer men most likely have same-sex attraction, but may also experience more fluid sexual desires that could include women or transgender individuals, which illustrates the ways in which *queer* exceeds sexual orientation.

[8] I do not claim a monolithic gay community exists, and I consciously try to avoid essentializing gay and lesbian people, as there are people who identify as gay or lesbian who do not seek assimilation. Furthermore, my critiques of mainstream gay and lesbian communities are directed toward the ideologies and power structures that operate within these communities and not toward individuals.

bodied males over those defined as others. Scholarly interrogation of social stratification and marginalization of identities benefits from a critical historicization that excavates the ways in which modernity and late-modernity have exacerbated social difference and hierarchy. Even in our seemingly post-modern condition, where identities proliferate within a late-capitalist frame, the lasting legacies of modernist cultural logic continue to have material effects on individuals and groups.

Acknowledging *modernity* as a contested concept, I situate my use of it within the framework of critical cultural studies. Modernity in this context can be thought of as the transition from a "God-centered view of history" to the "embrace of commerce and technological development" that started during the Renaissance and emerged "full force" around the French Revolution (During 52). The modernist shift from religious-based views of history to views rooted in science, economics, and technology was accelerated during colonial expansion. During this time, differentiation between groups of people was rationalized using "science-based" legitimating institutions—such as biology, medicine, and later anthropology—that flourished within modernity. In short, social stratification and regulation of the body became a matter of social and political contract in modern global expansion and was legitimated through scientific reason, which privileged the cognitive over the carnality of the body. Carnality was inherently tied to sin, and sin to sexuality—a genealogy that is important to preview here, which I expand on more below. The "naturalistic views" most often associated with traditional science have proven to be "popular justifications for racism" (Shilling 77) and by logical extension, sexism and heterosexism. In recent U.S. history, rationalization of differentiation based on race, class, ethnicity, age, sexuality, and ability has occurred, and

until recently, with a turn to alternative ways of theorizing the social which critique naturalistic views, these differences have been portrayed, through dominant ideologies, as natural and normal (Allen). In general, legitimation of social stratification and othering through traditional naturalistic research has been critiqued within the performance paradigm (Conquergood, "Rethinking"), which makes this history relevant to my method and overall project, and will be discussed more in Chapter Three.

The stratification of identities throughout modernity has been closely related to regulation of and surveillance of the body, which has been a consistent indicator of social and political temperament in recent human history (B. Turner 223). Turner states, "the dominant political concerns and anxieties of society tend to be translated into disrupted and disturbed images of the body" (224). In this sense, the body becomes a bridge between discourse and materiality, a notion central to my project in that I trace connections between and among the body, popular cultural representations, and politics.

While Bryan Turner discusses the body as a surface that is inscribed upon by "social and political temperament" (223), the body should not be thought of as completely passive. As noted earlier, identities and bodies are closely related, and there is space for agency in both. Within my research, I view the body as situated between the natural and the social, being careful neither to give way to the biological determinism of a purely natural view nor to a strong constructionist view that ignores the materiality of the body. Shilling conceptualizes this well: "The human body is important not only because it provides us with the basic ability to live, but because it shapes our identities and structures our interventions in and classifications of, the world" (65). Through this quotation, we see the body is truly a bridge between culture and identity and discourse

and materiality, which acknowledges the influence of the corpus, the biological and living materiality of our bodies, and leaves open a space for agency or a space for us to "intervene" in the discourses that shape our identities. Having established the body as an important part of social research in terms of subject of study and agentic tool, it is now important to expose how the social identity categories of *homosexual, gay* and later *queer* are neither ahistorical nor natural classifications.

While social stratification, in general, is part of the project of modernity, a focus on sexual regulation has been a recurring historical theme. Moreover, sexuality is a "critical social and political issue as well as an individual concern, and it therefore deserves a sustained historical and ideological investigation and analysis" (Weeks 365). In this project, to reiterate, I narrow my investigation and analysis of sexuality through the exploration of queer male identity in relation to bodies and politics.

Historical, Social, and Political Context

The homosexual male body is neither ahistorical nor transcendental; instead, the homosexual male body is a product of historically, culturally, and politically specific discourses and has emerged and changed for particular reasons over time. Sexual regulation is not just about sexual acts, it is a way for society to control "the lives of its members—for the sake of moral uniformity, economic prosperity, national security, or hygiene and health" (Weeks 374). This quote illustrates the powerful ways in which sexuality intersects with larger issues of morality, economics, politics, and health, which is not surprising considering sexuality's deep cultural connections to the reproduction of offspring and modernity's idealization of the biological and naturalistic sciences.

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Changes in social divisions based on sexuality in religion, capitalism, and politics have been especially important in regards to cultural and social perceptions of homosexual male bodies. While there are numerous ways one could trace the creation of the homosexual male subject, I focus on changes in dominant Western religion and forms of capital because they are especially relevant to contemporary discursive representations of gay male bodies in political and popular cultural discourses.

The Catholic Church began eradicating vernacular culture from its churches and surrounding communities in the 15th century (Illich). Part of this eradication included groups where homosexual acts were prevalent or perhaps even publicly acknowledged. Catholic priests, engaged in pastoral care in the homes of followers or potential converts, enforced a conjugal and heterosexual family based on patriarchal views of the church. This time period also marked the beginning of compulsory confession, which amounted to another form of surveillance over and regulation of individual and familial practices that included sexuality. Ultimately, "the pastor [was] now represented by the image of the celibate cock on the steeple, watching over a flock that included two sexes, [and] the bugger was the unredeemable enemy who had eventually to be burned" (153). Even though this history is chronologically far removed from the present day, religious discourses continue to other the gay body. Furthermore, the surveillance that resulted— surveillance between individuals and families as well as through mechanisms of the church like pastoral care and compulsory confession—is a precursor to surveillance of bodies that continues through to contemporary contexts.

Religious and political discourses that abject homosexuality have merged in recent years, and conservative discourses have capitalized on the visibility of gay[9] identity and culture and used gay culture as fodder for national political debates on issues like "gay marriage."[10] In short, the presence of a visible gay community can be held up as a straw figure that represents the moral decline of the nation and the threat to traditional family values. However, just as homosexuals were considered a threat to the institutional patriarchy of the Catholic Church, homosexuals were also scapegoats for the decline of the family as capitalism and individualism flourished during industrialization and urbanization.

D'Emilio ("Capitalism") discusses the connection between capitalism and gay identity. Industrialization, the spread of capitalism, and wage labor led to a slow decline, over 200 years, of the family as a self-sustaining productive unit. Large numbers of children were not needed for labor on the farm, and individuals could choose urban self-sustaining lives if they wanted. Essentially, capitalism weakened the material basis of the nuclear family, but capitalist ideology maintained the preeminence of the family, as the central affective unit in an individual's life in order to ensure the continual procreation of future producers and consumers. Here, an inherent contradiction in capitalism connects to people who do not fit or refuse to fit traditional sexual or familial norms. While capitalism, as the cause for the weakening of the family unity is not questioned within late-modernity, those who resist being pushed into traditional heterosexual family units

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[9] Here, I make an explicit change in labeling by using *gay* to refer to a socio-cultural identity instead of *homosexual* to refer to sex acts.

[10] I put gay marriage in quotation marks because there are numerous peripheral terms such as civil unions, domestic partnerships, and marriage equality that are sometimes used interchangeably. I use gay marriage as shorthand for these other terms.

such as "lesbians, gay men, and heterosexual feminists have become the scapegoats for the instability of the system" (269). The historical changes in religious and economic discourses are parallel in that they both position gay bodies as a threat to the family and therefore position those bodies as other. Ironically, as the gay liberation movement became stronger and more visible, so did the conservative discourses that marked homosexuality or the "gay lifestyle"[11] as deviant and/or sinful.

While the relationship between historical religious discourses that have othered gay bodies and current conservative discourses is straightforward, there is an ironic relationship between the capitalist discourses that othered those outside of the traditional family unit and current discourses. The flexibility of capitalism as an ancillary project of modernity has opened up discursive space for gay men, and all people with sufficient monetary capital, to cultivate "unique" identities within their own niche markets. This discursive space for differentiated identities (Giddens) emerged within late-capitalism in the second part of the 20th century. In late-capitalism, commodity production reaches its frenzy, while the economy simultaneously becomes information and service based (Jameson). Essentially, this new space for niche markets and the cultivation of unique identities leads to a commodification of identities, as identities are *created* around and by product consumption. In this sense, gay cultural identity, complete with the niche marketing and commodities that come with it, becomes more visible and ostensibly "included" in society. However, cultural critics question the legitimacy of such inclusion. For example, the Bravo cable network's *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* has been likened

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[11] "Gay lifestyle" is a term that has been critiqued because it connotes sexual orientation is a choice. However, this connotation makes its use a rhetorically sound strategy for those who oppose gays and lesbian individuals and rights.

to a form of gay minstrelsy where style experts perpetuate stereotypes to transform bland heterosexual men into metrosexuals (Sender) in a format that is laden with consumerism, product placement, and corporate sponsorship. Images in the glossy magazines produced by gay media show a narrow range of publicly palpable, if not idealized, gay and lesbian bodies (Cover; Schulman) and advertisers have flocked to sell products to this "new" market to the extent that the late owner of *The Advocate*[12] retired a millionaire (Tucker 4).

This type of commercial inclusion, symbolized by highly circulated and visible gay publications and gay characters on prime-time television, is celebrated by people (both gay and straight) as a sign the gay rights movement has "succeeded." The capitalist discourses that historically othered homosexuality have morphed into the late-capitalist inclusion of gay men as consumer subjects: but at what costs? As Hennessey notes, gay men can be consumer subjects but are not included as social subjects. However, in a society where consumerism is oftentimes more valued than citizenship or even conflated with citizenship, it should not be surprising that this type of inclusion is celebrated as a civil rights victory.

This distilled overview of two important institutions, religion and capitalism, historicizes the creation of the gay male subject and how that creation is already imbued with the citationality of otherness and deviance. The social stratifying project of modernity offers inclusion as consumer subjects while obfuscating its negative history of othering. In Chapter Four, I analyze how queer identities contribute to and contest these dominant discourses, but now I turn to more specific, and more contemporary, instances

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[12] *The Advocate* is considered by most to be the national gay publication of record.

of how gay male bodies are othered to emphasize the ways in which discourses of

deviance are still present, both covertly and overtly.

<center>"Deviance" and "Decline": Gay Bodies as Political Ammunition</center>

The creation of the gay subject was not neutral and continues to serve particular

dominant social and political interests. Terry and Urla map the process through which

certain bodies became marked as deviant. They discuss a large "effort to organize social

relations according to categories denoting normality versus aberration [and] health versus

pathology" (1). The construction of the deviant body is necessary for the privileging of

the normal body, for there can be no concept of normalcy unless there is a point of

comparison. However, the comparison is never neutral, as this labeling creates social

divisions that favor the dominant group.

The legacy of othering continues in the 20th and 21st centuries through the

citationality of deviance that gay bodies in more contemporary contexts still carry. Weeks

provides an instructive timeline worth quoting at length:

> By the 1950s, in the depth of the Cold War, there was a new searching out of
> sexual "degenerates," especially homosexuals, who not only lived outside
> families but were also, apparently, peculiarly susceptible to treason. By the 1960s,
> a new liberalism ("permissiveness") seemed torn between relaxing the old
> authoritarian social codes and finding new models of social regulation, based on
> the latest in social psychology, and a redefinition of the public/private divide. By
> the 1970s and 1980s there was, in effect, the beginning of a backlash against what
> were seen as the excesses of the earlier decade, and perhaps for the first time
> sexuality became a real front-line political issue as the emergence of the New
> Right identified the "decline of the family," feminism and the new homosexual
> militancy as potent symbols of national decline. (375)

This quote outlines some of the recent, late 20th century ways in which the othering of

homosexuality has been traced to the rise of the "New Right." The New Right refers to

right-wing movements from the 1960s to present day, which reasserted "the old fusionist

<center>24</center>

blend of anti-communism, traditionalism, and libertarianism" (Diamond 127-128). Not only did the New Right attack "postmodernist, feminist, postcolonial, and other minority discourses," they also "rolled back civil rights legislation [and] waged antipornography campaigns against the arts in order to eliminate public funding for 'politically offensive' groups" (Giroux 4). The New Right's conservative mobilization led to increased racism (Ansell), antiabortion and antifeminist sentiment (Petchesky), and surveillance of sexuality (A. Smith). The formation of the New Right began in the 1960s, gained prominence in the 1970s, and gained control of the politics of the country with the 1980 election of Reagan (Diamond). The rise of the New Right coincided with the beginning of the gay liberation movement in the 1970s, and the AIDS pandemic struck as the New Right comfortably controlled the White House and Congress in the 1980s.

Weeks specifically notes how the AIDS pandemic served as a mobilizing catalyst for the New Right, solidified their fear of gay men, and legitimated their perception of gay men as deviant, sinful abominations (390). Gay men were already targets for rhetoric that defined them as hypersexual and promiscuous, and when it became known that AIDS was most often transmitted through unprotected anal intercourse, gay male sex acts became spotlighted. Promiscuity and sodomy were easy munitions for those wanting to target gay men, as they easily relate to "natural laws" that abject sodomy as non-procreative (Prager) and religious laws that abject it as sin (Wilson). These discourses also medicalized and pathologized gay men who, in the wake of AIDS, were seen as pollutants, "portending a threat to the hegemonic values of modernized societies" (Weeks 392).

Discourses of hypersexualization, whether implicit or explicit, are important parts of the cultural logic of modernity that has sought to legitimate, through science, differentiation between groups of people. The commodification and sexualization of the body was a common way of othering those who were colonized or enslaved (Hall, "Spectacle"). For example, scientists fixated on the genitals and other body parts of Africans as a way to prove their inferiority to the dominant white race (Fausto-Sterling). These historical narratives, although decades removed from the late 20th century, are latent in dominant discourses and easily tapped into by those wishing to maintain particular social hierarchies.

Unfortunately, this type of medicalized othering is not new for sexual minorities. Katz (*Gay American*) found that in the 1800s and 1900s, castration, hysterectomy, vasectomy, drug therapy (hormones, LSD or "acid"), and electro-convulsive therapy were common treatments for homosexuality. He also found documentation that a lobotomy to cure homosexuality was performed as late as 1951. In the field of psychiatry, it was not until the 1970s that homosexuality was removed as a mental illness from the American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic manual. These examples of the violent ways gay men have been othered in our recent past are not often invoked in discussions of gay men in popular culture or political discourses. I now turn to a discussion of how queer theory can be critically employed to deconstruct these dominant discourses.

<center>Queer Theory as Criticism</center>

Queer theory questions traditional categories of gender and sexuality that have been oppressive to hetero- and homosexuals alike. For example, queer theory has been critical of family and marriage as a patriarchal (Baird and Rosenbaum) and oppressive

<center>26</center>

(Cohen) institutions that perpetuate heterosexist ideology (Judith Butler *Undoing*). While there are multiple representations of "gay rights" [13] issues in political discourses, I focus on the national gay marriage debate because it is pervasive and because there is a strong queer critique of marriage and family. The "gay side" of the marriage "debate"[14] mostly espouses a civil rights-oriented stance that argues for inclusion, which is reflected in popular and scholarly texts (A. Sullivan; Wolfson). Conversely, the gay marriage debate in the U.S. has been critiqued by queer scholars as an assimilationist strategy (Slagle, "Ferment") that can only be the central "activist" issue for those whose sexual orientation is insulated, via their privileges, from other pressing identity categories such as race and class (Ferguson).

Queer theory also critiques assimilationist strategies of inclusion, which are present in mainstream images of gay male bodies. As gay culture and styles are mainstreamed in ways that are meant to increase lucrative markets and commodification (Hennessey), particular images are represented as ideal—a strategy that is pervasive in all advertising. Gay readers are "bombarded by the A-list, buff, white, male, wealthy stereotype" that constitutes a shared cultural discourse but does not mirror the reality of what most gay men look like or experience (Schulman 13). What Duggan terms the "new homonormativity" is a strategy to exclude unwanted queer people and images from

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[13] I place gay rights in quotation marks to problematize the ways in which this terminology implies a universal consensus among gay people on what rights, should one even wish to pursue them, are desirable.

[14] I put gay side and debate in quotation marks to symbolize the way in which issues surrounding same-sex relationships are reductively represented in national discourses as "for" and "against" and how a more radical queer perspective, that critiques the institution of marriage, is left out of this debate because most often, gay people are essentialized into one category of people who unequivocally support gay marriage as a pressing political issue.

public space in order to protect the marketable and publicly palpable images of gay men that proliferate in late-capitalism.

Queer theory's critiques of mainstream discourses regarding sexuality provide powerful theoretical tools for deconstruction, but I question how people who claim a queer identity experience these discourses. Does queerness, in lived experience, subvert mainstream discourses? While I can begin to articulate connections between the historical othering of gay male bodies in modernity and how that othering is continued in late-modernity, there is no research on how or if these discourses of othering affect queer men. In my project, I discuss with my participants how their personal (queer) politics affect their views of gay rights issues like marriage and family in order to analyze whether or not their queer identity carries with it critiques of marriage and family similar to those of queer theorists. I also talk with my participants about their bodies in relation to representations of gay male bodies in order to analyze whether or not claiming a queer identity influences how they view their own and others' bodies. While I do not try to establish causal links between popular culture representations, political representations, and embodied queer identity, my research asks questions that challenge queer theory to check its theoretical claims with intersubjective research methods. In the following chapter, I present an in-depth discussion of queer theory, queer communication studies, and identity.

CHAPTER TWO

QUEER THEORY, IDENTITY, AND THEIR DISCONTENTS

Having established a historical, social, and political context for this project, I now build onto that context, a theoretical perspective through which I propose to view communication phenomena. In short, I examine queer male identity and the contexts that inform it through a queer theoretical perspective using performance-based methods. Queer scholars have historicized homosexuality, focused on how the body has been disciplined, critiqued identity politics, and questioned assimilationist rhetoric, but they have not often expanded their scope to triangulate queer theorizations with the lived experience of queer-identified people. While feminist and cultural studies have taken a reflexive turn toward "locating the interplay among theory, praxis, and experience" (Rowe 19), queer theory continues to favor theory over experience. Perhaps this is due to epistemological tensions between queer theory's poststructuralist foundation and more empirical and interpretive paradigms that guide research on human interaction. In this chapter, I join in the intellectual labor of scholars who are already working through some of these tensions in sociology (Gamson; Green), phenomenology (Ahmed), and autoethnography (Adams and Jones) by specifically focusing on queer theory, identity, and intersubjective personal narratives.

First, I briefly introduce and discuss queer theory as an academic approach. Then, in order to map the scholarly conversation regarding queer theory in Communication

Studies, I offer a critical review of literature that leads into a discussion of critiques of

queer theory. I then overview debates regarding disconnects between queer theory and

identity. Finally, I discuss the heuristic value of a queer perspective in Human

Communication Studies and present my research questions.

<center>"Queer" as an Academic Approach</center>

Queer as a reclaimed word has an activist and academic history. The word was

reclaimed as affirmative rather than pejorative at a 1990 AIDS activist conference

(Berlant and Freeman 198) and was, that same year, paired jokingly with *theory* for the

first time at a conference organized by Teresa de Lauretis in California (Halperin 339).

Almost immediately, the newly coined *queer theory* proliferated within academic and

activist settings and continues to do so today.[15] Queer theory frequently traces its

intellectual origins to Sedgwick and Judith Butler (*Bodies*; *Gender*), who were both

heavily influenced by the work of Foucault (*History*). While much of queer theory still

resides in Literary Studies, Sociology is at the forefront of queer theory in the social

sciences. While I make a purposeful choice to focus my review of literature within

Human Communication Studies, I also reference sociologists who have already begun

meta-theoretical and methodological discussions of queer theory.

It should not be surprising that *queer* is a contested term in the academy and in the

community (Gamson, "Must"). While *queer* has been used as an umbrella term under

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[15] While queer theory and activism proliferated in the 1990s, the presence, visibility, and effectivity of
queer politics has lessened in the 2000s (Reinelt 311).

which to include GLBT people, Gamson ("Sexualities") prefers a more specific academic

and political usage:[16]

> I use [queer] in its more distinctive sense, as a marker of the instability of identity. *Queer* marks an identity that, defined as it is by a deviation from sex and gender norms either by the self inside or by specific behaviors, is always in flux…. (349)

Queer, in this sense, refers to a critical view of identities and politics that opposes

established social and academic norms. Queer theory, then, critiques assimilationist

views of sexuality and identity, denaturalizes binary identity categories like

hetero/homosexual, and questions identity politics. In short, it seeks to "destabilize the

social order" (Green 28), and I continue to build on this introductory definition

throughout the remaining chapters. Rather than offer a complete historical genealogy of

queer theory, as others have already done (Jagose; N. Sullivan; W. Turner), I ground my

review of literature in queer communication studies and attempt to address some critiques

of queer theory that are relevant to my research.

From Queering Communication to Communicating Queerness

Queer theory diffused primarily into the humanities, but has also been employed

in social sciences, where gay and lesbian studies was already somewhat established. This

divergence is worth noting because there are continuing points of contestation between

the ways in which queer theory is utilized in the humanities versus the social sciences.

Queer theory fit well into the humanities' textual and discursive orientation as a

critical/analytical tool. However, the social sciences' reliance on notions of a reportable

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[16] I agree with Gamson's caution and specifically avoid conflating my use of *queer* with *gay* or using *queer* as an umbrella term for GLBT persons or communities. I use GLBT or GLBTQ when referring to sexual minorities in general. However, this acronym is also problematized, as bisexuals and transgender people are often ignored or excluded from mainstream gay and lesbian communities. Therefore, I use gay and lesbian when referring specifically to gay men and lesbian women and queer when referring to queer theory, queer activism, or an explicitly avowed identity label that is distinct from gay.

or interpretable reality created some friction with queer theory's radical

deconstructionism and desubjectification.[17] I argue that Communication Studies is

uniquely equipped to span the academic divide between queer theory in the humanities

and social sciences.

Communication Studies has been described as a "queer discipline" (Slagle,

"Testing"). Invested in both the humanities and the social sciences, Communication

Studies has adapted to changing disciplinary trends and paradigm shifts. Communication

Studies is also broad and encompasses many subfields and paradigms; therefore, it is

important and necessary for me to narrow my focus and situate my research within the

broader field. First, I draw a distinction between Human Communication Studies—which

includes rhetoric, ethics, interpersonal, and intercultural, among others—and Mass

Communication Studies, which includes public relations, journalism, and media studies,

among others.[18] For the purposes of this literature review and my dissertation project, I

focus on human communication. Human Communication Studies is also a diverse field

that employs a variety of methods ranging from rhetorical criticism and discursive

analysis to participant observation, interviewing, and personal narrative. I am not

privileging one sub-disciplinary or methodological approach over the other. Rather, I

intersect discursive analysis, as used in Chapter One, with intersubjective methods to

highlight the flexibility and heuristic value of queer theory.

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[17] It is important to note that within the social sciences there is a range of epistemologies and ontologies ranging from objective, to constructionist, to constructivist; therefore, I am not attempting to dichotomize philosophies or paradigmatic approaches in the social sciences and humanities.

[18] I am not proposing these categories are totalizing or neatly bounded, as is evidenced in many Communication departments and by the very interdisciplinary nature of Communication Studies. However, these demarcations are useful for the purposes of narrowing my literature review.

Emergence in the Field

Gay and lesbian communication studies emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. The pivotal and influential volume most representative of this research was *GaySpeak: Gay Male and Lesbian Communication,* which was edited by James W. Chesebro, and contained essays from such notable communication scholars as James Darsey, Sally Miller Gearhart, and Joseph DeVito, among others. While this work is important and no doubt influenced, and continues to influence, queer communication studies, I draw conceptual boundaries between gay and lesbian communication studies and queer communication studies.[19] While gay and lesbian studies treats gay and lesbian identities and experiences as stable and espouses a minoritizing view homosexuality, queer communication studies questions and deconstructs categories of difference on a broader scale (Yep, Lovaas, and Elia, "Introduction"). Gay and lesbian communication studies frequently employed intersubjective research methods; however, queer studies, in general, does not engage in "field" research favoring instead discursive and textual analysis (Gamson, "Sexualities" 355). Furthermore, queer communication studies does not share the same rich history of gay and lesbian communication studies since it has more recently emerged: "In spite of the theoretical currency and the pragmatic utility of queer theory, the Communication discipline is just beginning to acknowledge, recognize, and apply its fundamental tenets to the study of human communication" (Yep, Lovaas, and Elia, "Introduction" 3).

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[19] I do not claim that one approach is superior to the other, as I have and continue to research GLBTQ issues from both perspectives. For a detailed overview of the relationship between LGBT studies and queer theory, theory, I again recommend Lovaas, Elia, and Yep's 2006 edited volume *LGBT Studies and Queer Theory: New Conflicts, Collaborations, and Contested Terrains*.

An abbreviated yet representative tracing of the emergence of gay and lesbian studies and evolution to queer studies within Communication is illustrated in the publishing of *GaySpeak* in 1981 (Chesebro), *Queer Words/Queer Images* in 1994 (Ringer), and *Queer Theory and Communication* in 2003 (Yep, Lovaas, and Elia). The first was solely gay and lesbian communication, the second was a continuation of more traditional gay and lesbian communication research albeit with the name *queer* in the title, and the latter represented a marked and explicit shift to a critical queer consciousness and is the most rigorous and thorough application of queer theory in Communication (Yep, Lovaas, and Elia, "Introduction").

The actual moment of emergence for queer communication studies can be traced to Slagle's 1995 essay *In Defense of Queer Nation*, which was the first explicitly queer article to appear in the pages of a Communication journal. Slagle provides a poignant analysis of Queer Nation, one of the most visible queer activist groups, and explores the ways in which queer theory can be applied to nationalism, heteronormativity, and assimilationist rhetoric of gay liberationists. Positioned mostly in rhetoric, Slagle ("(Re)Conceptualizing") brought queer criticism, social movement rhetoric, and queer communication pedagogy into conversation in the field with this article and his dissertation ten years ago, and the discipline continues to address these same questions and topics today.

Critical Review of Literature

Having traced the emergence of queer theory in Communication Studies, I now turn to existing overviews of queer theory in the field. There are two literature reviews on GLBTQ communication studies which I outline and evaluate below. The reviews

critically assess GLBTQ communication studies and offer suggestions for future research that are relevant to my project. These reviews do not solely focus on queer theory, as they address GLBTQ communication studies more generally. Therefore, I only highlight sections that discuss queer theory or are otherwise relevant to my project.

Gross, begins his article *The Past and the Future of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies* by tracing the emergence of gay and lesbian communication studies and the move toward queer theory. In a subsection titled "Queer New World," Gross discussed the rise of queer activism that influenced queer scholarship in the academy, which he claims resulted in "warring camps" between essentialists and constructionists. His militaristic analogy, though overdramatic, points to important epistemological debates I overview in subsequent sections of this chapter. However, despite including "queer" in the title of this subsection, the research he cites is media and political research that is gay and lesbian communication studies and not based in queer theory. Furthermore, his thesis that gay and lesbian and queer scholars are "divided" continues to play out through examples that show the author's preference for the former. Gross's examples also illuminate his lack of a critical, intersectional perspective. Specifically, he compares Black gay viewers' reactions to the stereotypes in *In Living Color's* "Men on Film" skit[20] to how white gay viewers of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* must feel regarding stereotypes portrayed in the show. Gross's comparison ignores the historical weight associated with intersections of race and sexuality and essentializes the

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[20] This popular skit featured two presumably heterosexual African-American male actors who portrayed two gay, feminine, and flamboyant film critics. The characters often fawned over male actors in the films they reviewed, like Denzel Washington, focusing more on their sexual fantasies regarding the leading men than the plot of the film.

complexity within the identities of male, Black, white, and gay. Despite Gross's slighted

disdain for queer theory, I agree with his call to action for GLBT and queer

communication scholars:

> Although queer theorists deny the reality, or at least the conceptual reality, of
> stable sexual identities—however they might be subjectively experienced by
> actual people—psychiatric authorities helpfully join with anxious parents to
> enforce their preferred identities on "gender nonconforming" children and
> adolescents. (523-524)

Gross's call for application of queer theory to contexts that account for the material

consequences of particular discourses and identities is warranted, as is his critique of

queer theory in this instance. However, his unexplained conflation of gender and sexual

identities in this example is problematic[21], as is his conflation of white and Black gay

identities in the previously cited example from *In Living Color*. Despite these conflations,

Gross makes a move toward intersectionality when he states that the juncture of sexual

identities and race, ethnicity, and class warrants more scholarly attention. Gross's implicit

call for more queer application to human interaction and more acknowledgment of the

material consequences of identity, and his explicit call for intersectionality are relevant to

my research goals.

Henderson ("Queer Communication") specifically engages with queer theory in

her review. She acknowledges that queer theory's activist roots engage civil rights as well

as more radical liberation strategies: "Queer studies in communication has emerged in the

context of activist momentum for civil rights and sexual liberation for erotic minorities"

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[21] In this example, Gross refers to queer theorists' denial of stable "sexual identities" and then gives an
example of "gender non-conforming" children. While I am unsure if Gross is using "sexual" to refer to
"biological sex" or sexual-orientations, in either case, his example is problematic because gender is distinct
from "biological sex" and gender is distinct from sexual-orientation.

(466). She traces the interdisciplinary scholarly conversation on sexualities studies[22],

which she concludes is most concerned with asking: "How has sexuality been pressed

into discourse at different times and in different places, and what have been the sexual

and *non*sexual consequences of such discursive production?" (468). Importantly,

Henderson avoids language that essentializes the utility of queer theory solely to

sexuality. Then, she articulates Communication Studies' relationship to this question:

> These questions acquire particular vigor in communication, given the field's
> central concern with human symbolic behavior in social, cultural, and historical
> context. As I have suggested, then, all communication scholars have a potential
> stake in the analysis of sexual practice, discourse, difference, and hierarchy….
> (468)

Staking a claim for Human Communication Studies in queer scholarship, Henderson's

words highlight the importance of contextualizing communication phenomena and the

potential for queer communication studies to examine multiple iterations of difference

and hierarchy, which both inform my research goals. In the conclusion of her review,

Henderson gestures toward the need for more critical interpretive and reflexive research

on sexualities and communication:

> I invite scholars…to continue to develop the repertoire of concrete research on
> sexual identification, expression, pleasure, and regulation in living populations
> and social institutions; and, finally, to queer their own sensibilities toward a more
> nuanced recognition of the place of communicative practice in human sexual life.
> (481)

Again, Henderson articulates the ways in which communication scholars can capitalize

on the practically and concreteness of communication as a symbolic practice in order to

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[22] Sexualities studies refers to the broad interdisciplinary field that examines sexuality and sexual
orientation and includes gay and lesbian studies and queer theory. Within the text, I strategically chose
from the three terms and use the one most relevant to my discussion.

better understand sexuality and other forms of difference within and among individuals, communities, and institutions.

Aside from the two existing literature reviews on GLBTQ communication, there is a rich body of scholarship that explores sexuality through media analysis and rhetorical criticism. While this work does not utilize intersubjective research methods, it is an important part of the ongoing scholarly conversation in queer communication studies. Sloop and Charles E. Morris are influential names in queer rhetorical criticism. Sloop queers normative and non-normative representations of gender in a range of rhetorical artifacts in his book *Disciplining Gender*. In addition, Morris and Sloop examine public queer kissing as an example of rhetorical activism by members of Queer Nation, an organization that has also been the subject of rhetorical investigation by Slagle ("In Defense") and Rand ("Disunited"). Morris's newest edited volume, *Queering Public Address*, represents the cutting-edge of queer theory in relation to historical and rhetorical textual criticism, while scholars in queer media studies have examined popular cultural artifacts ranging from Pee-Wee Herman (Slagle, "Queer") to *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (Weiss; Westerfelhaus and Lacroix). Research in Performance Studies has also offered poignant examinations of the performative citationality of gay male bodies (Fox, "Skinny"), the performance of sexuality and race through disidentification (Muñoz), and the performance of sexuality and Blackness (Johnson, "Specter"; Johnson, "'Quare'").

In summary, existing literature on queer studies in Communication is primarily located in rhetorical criticism and media studies. The existing critical reviews of literature focus on GLBTQ communication studies and not solely queer theory. However, the existing reviews of literature, call for more intersubjective applications of queer theory,

more applications to material consequences of sexuality, and a more thorough treatment

of intersectionality. While these authors are suggesting rather than doing, they point

toward new directions in queer communication studies to which my dissertation

contributes. Next, I outline existing research on identity and human interaction that uses a

queer frame before turning to critiques of queer theory that are relevant to my research.

Toward Intersubjective Applications of Queer Theory in Communication

Identity is a communicative process and an important part of communication-

based research on culture (Collier and Thomas). Nicholas theoretically explores sexual

identities and how they are influenced through multi-layered social, historical, political,

and cultural contexts. She skillfully outlines interdisciplinary epistemologies regarding

sexual identities and successfully articulates the heuristic value of layered theoretical

approaches. While Nicholas' theoretical ruminations are parsimonious, their potential is

not actualized through actual research application. Rather than evaluate the theoretical

framework Nicholas develops, I turn to her use of *queer*. Nicholas' use of *queer* is in

keeping with the definition preferred by Gamson and other queer scholars in that she does

not use it as an umbrella term for GLBT communities. In addition, the author highlights

the need for more diverse applications of research on sexualities including queer theory,

by suggesting communication scholars "place different theoretical and epistemological

perspectives into dialogue" in order to "better comprehend how people negotiate,

maintain, develop, reify, or rupture an identity" (310). She also acknowledges that

theories of identity range from essentialist to constructivist; however, she does not broach

the significant epistemological differences between queer theory and identity that are

important to negotiate before moving toward intersubjective application. I applaud

Nicholas' ambitious goals and pointed suggestions for the potential of combining communication, identity, and sexuality studies, and I move to engage with some of her suggestions in this project.

Yep, Lovaas, and Elia's 2003 germinal edited volume, *Queer Theory and Communication*, brings together varied queer research perspectives ranging from essays on theory and method to completed research projects; however, the majority of completed research projects utilized textual analysis rather than intersubjective research methods.[23] Three articles employed auto-methods and highlighted the personal voice of the author, including: one article that uses phenomenology to talk about her identity in relation to queer theory (Martinez), one article with reflections on transnationalism through autocritography (W. Lee), and one article with autoethnographic reflections on being involved in an transgender activist group (John Butler). While these articles bring together personal voice and queer identity in meaningful ways, they are more intrasubjective than intersubjective. Only two articles utilized intersubjective methods, which included the voices of participants (D. Fisher; Masequesmay).

Diana Fisher examines hybridity and critiques the dominant notion of the "closet" as a space of denial and despair through ethnographic methods within the Russian immigrant "queer" community in West Hollywood. Masequesmay examines intersecting identities among Vietnamese-American lesbians. Both authors use *queer* as an umbrella term more than as a specific theoretical/political perspective; however, I suggest their research is "queer." Even though the authors do not specifically connect to the genealogy

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[23] I do not want mean to diminish the influence of this edited volume. Although there were few applications of queer theory in communication contexts using human participants, the theoretical and methodological pieces in the volume synthesize, critique, and extend queer theory in important ways.

of queer theory, they highlight intersectionality, critique heteronormativity, and bring to their writing underrepresented voices from within gay and lesbian communities; all of which implicitly address goals of queer theoretical scholarship.

Beyond the articles cited above, I found only a few other examples of queerness being explored from an explicitly communication-centered context using human participants. Fox ("Gay Grows") examines intergenerational communication within a social organization for older gay men. Like Diana Fisher and Masequesmay, Fox's uses *queer* as an identity marker that can substitute for or be used interchangeably with gay; however, he does position his use of queer within the genealogy of queer theory. Although Fox's participants are not queer-identified, he specifically questions them about their perception of *queer* as a reclaimed label, finding the older men he interviewed were mostly opposed to its usage. In this instance, Fox's article includes meta-communication about queerness, which I expand on in my project. Two other examples of intersubjective "queer" research use virtual ethnographic methods.

Campbell analyzes gay male sexuality online by focusing explicitly on the body. He analyzes the connection between corporeality and gay identity, which illustrates the important role of the body in creating and maintaining identities. His framework is especially relevant to my project in that sexuality, identity, and the body are important themes in the narratives I present in Chapter Four. Although Campbell's research includes human participants, he does not specifically connect with the genealogy of queer theory and his research participants are gay-identified rather than queer-identified. Fox's (*Gays*) research also informs my project in that he uses personal narrative and theories of performativity to explore how gay men communicate their identities online. While these

virtual ethnographies utilize intersubjective methods, analyze the body in relation to sexuality, and draw upon theories of performativity, neither of them includes research participants who explicitly identify as queer.

After reviewing the literature in Human Communication Studies relevant to sexualities studies and queer theory, I conclude there is quality foundational research that explores sexual identities in diverse and productive ways, which informs my research. While existing scholarship, to varying degrees, utilizes queer theory in research with human subjects, employs personal narrative as methodology, and focuses on the body, I did not uncover research that combines these components into one conceptual framework.

Relevant Critiques of Queer Theory: What Still Needs Attention?

All theories risk becoming hegemonic, normalized, or exclusive if they are not reflexively critiqued by the scholars who engage them (Mendoza 1-2). Queer scholars have critiqued queer theory in a reflexive attempt to push the boundaries of queer theorizing and maximize its radical potential. By addressing some of these critiques, my project expands the heuristic value of queer theory within Human Communication Studies. Rather than engaging in a debate over the wholesale merits of queer theory, I turn to ongoing metatheoretical discussions and critiques of queer theory within "new queer studies."

Critics of queer theory claim it has not lived up to the radical and emancipatory ideals offered at its inception. Those who have critiqued queer theory operate at its cusps—an approach queer theory might prefer since it rejects a center—and pushed for "new" ways of queer theorizing. Halberstam notes "queer studies in the academy is

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flourishing in the work of a new generation of scholars who have had the benefit of training in queer theory at the graduate level" (361). What she calls the "new moment of queer studies" offers a more expanded queer research scope that "refuses to see sexuality as a singular mode of inquiry and instead makes sexuality a central category of analysis in the study of racialization, transnationalism, and globalization" (361). Henderson, like Halberstam, claims the "queer political agenda" for the new millennium needs to be expanded ("Queer Theory"). Manalansan also acknowledges queer theory is expanding into what he terms the "new queer studies." He notes scholars in new queer studies come "from the intersection of established disciplines and formerly marginalized terrain of the American academy such as ethnic studies, postcolonial studies, women's studies, and gay and lesbian studies" (6). While he does not include critical cultural studies, I would argue that it could and should be included in his list. While scholars in new queer studies—or, as Yep (*GLBTQ*) labels it, "second generation queer theory"—are expanding queer theorizing and addressing its weaknesses, it remains important to overview, in more detail, critiques emanating from new queer studies that are relevant to my project. They are: One, queer theory needs to balance a commitment to interrogation of discourse and materiality; and two, queer theory needs a more thoroughgoing treatment of and commitment to intersectionality. Addressing these critiques is especially relevant to my research project in order to provide a foundation for intersubjective research on queer identities.

Discourse versus Materiality?

In order to critique queer theory's unbalanced focus on the "discursive" over the "material," I broadly conceptualize the two terms in an attempt to neither conflate nor

essentialize them. Generally, I conceptualize theory, texts, and language as discourse, and practice and lived experience as material. More specifically, I ground my conceptualizations of discourse and materiality in literature on queer theory and performance. While some queer scholars have critiqued the textualizing of reality and lived experience from a more traditional Marxist perspective that strives to ground sexuality in the materiality of class differences (see Morton), I view materiality from the performance paradigm, which focuses on the body. From this view, textualizing experience perpetuates the dualism of the mind/body split that privileges the mind and abjects the body (Conquergood, "Rethinking"). The body-in-practice is central to the performance paradigm, which acknowledges how the body, in relation to texts/discourses and other bodies, constitutes meaning, culture, and identity.

I also draw on Hall's ("West") definition of discourse as "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about—a way of representing the knowledge about—a particular topic at a particular historical moment….Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language" (291). Hall's definition highlights the important connection between historical and contemporary discourses by acknowledging the influence that history has on contemporary meanings. By focusing on the materiality of the body in relation to the discourses and representations that make the body meaningful, as I did in Chapter One, it becomes clear that the body occupies a special place between the discursive and material. The human body is symbol-producing, but it is also a material surface upon which discourses are inscribed, resisted, and transformed. Combining queer theory and the performance paradigm pushes queer theory to account

more for the body, which consequently begins to remedy queer theory's unbalanced attention to the discursive.[24]

Gamson ("Sexualities"; "Reflections") is a proponent of applications of queer theory that are not solely text based, and he reviews other queer theorists' criticisms that queer theory is moving away from lived experience in favor of a focus on the "grammar of culture" (Tierney 9-10), and that queer theory "over textualizes lesbian and gay experiences" causing "analyses of discourse [to] overtake the analysis of real world events" (Plummer 611). Plummer's critique is directed at the field of sexualities studies in general:

> There are important studies to be done in the empirical world, and an obsession with texts is dangerous indeed. It is time to move beyond the text—and rapidly. Whilst lesbian and gay studies "plays" more and more fancifully with a wide array of poems, novels, and films, relatively little research actually exists on what is going on in gay and lesbian worlds right now. (611)

All of these scholars point to the lack of attention to materiality in favor of discursive analysis and, in essence, question the relevance of queer theory to the daily lives of GLBTQ people.

While the scholars above seem to advocate for the importance of materiality over discourse, Henderson ("Queer Theory") offers another call for queer scholars to bridge discourse and materiality while not privileging one over the other:

> Symbols are not the only resources at our disposal, and I am not confused about the difference between an insult and a bullet, the first a "mere" symbol and the second a lethal object. But show me a bullet imagined, built, propelled or retrieved without language and other practices of meaning-formation, and I'll show you wishful thinking, itself a significant symbolic gesture. Queer communication theory can contribute to the short-hand that distinguishes "discursive" and "material" while exploring the very material conditions and effects of symbol-production. (378)

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[24] I overview the importance of the body within the performance paradigm in more detail in Chapter Three.

This quote speaks directly to the way I position my research in between discourse and materiality. I consciously avoid making an "either/or" false choice, and instead make a "both/and" choice that acknowledges the power and influence of both, since symbols and materiality surely do influence and mutually constitute one another. Swartz articulates the connection between language and materiality in the following: "Language does support material conditions in which people are seriously mistreated; recognizing this compels us to intervene" (14). Henderson and Swartz include calls to action in their discussion of language and materiality, implying that acknowledging the power and influence of language in the perpetuation of inequality mandates that communication scholars, who are committed to social justice, take steps to mitigate that negative cycle. Heinz echoes this sentiment, specifically calling on queer theorists to check queer theory's claims and evaluate its relevance to day-to-day lives:

> To be more than an academic fad, queer theory needs to engage in the self-reflexivity it indulges in so extensively when it comes to individual productions of scholarship. Rather than applauding its own performativity, it needs to be tested and measured in terms of its applicability to the dilemmas from which it arose. Its advocates need to rediscover the material realities of structural inequalities, realize the urgency to link concrete political action with outcomes of theoretical work, and recognize their accountability to the queer realities of everyday life. (373)

This eloquent and sharp critique pushes queer theory toward more reflexivity, which is an important part of new queer studies. Heinz's critique also urges queer theorists to question the practicalities and effectivity of queer theory in multiple contexts.

Critiques of queer theory's unbalanced attention to texts are echoed by Martinez who invokes the importance of theory *and* method by claiming phenomenological self-exploration can help "us to straddle the gap between the abstractions of theory and the

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concreteness of experience" (112). Martinez's theoretical contributions come as she reflects on the important role that Moraga and Anzaldúa's edited volume *This Bridge Called my Back* had in teaching her about theories of the flesh and the often neglected importance of body knowledge. She offers sound advice for scholars working at the intersections of culture and identity, suggesting they employ "both the cool edge of a precise theoretical argument and the burning edge of fleshy experience" (124). In other words, approaches that combine critical theory, intersubjectivity, and self-reflexivity can capitalize on the intellectual fertility that exists at the juncture of discourse and materiality. If queer theorists took Martinez's advice to account for theories of the flesh and Heinz's advice to explore the queer realities of everyday life, might not the scope of queer theory be expanded beyond the hetero/homosexuality binary? Ralph Smith claims queer theory's lack of attention to materiality has prevented queer scholars from adequately accounting for economic inequity and material exploitation. For example, many working class GLBTQ people may be more oppressed by their class status than their sexual orientation. An intersubjective and intersectional queer perspective could examine how those two systems of oppression, racism and classism, intersect to complicate social positioning and social theorizing. While queer theory surely provides the cool precise edge of theory, it is largely missing the burning edge of fleshy experience. Scholars in new queer studies, especially scholars of color, continue to push queer theory to account for the materiality of identities. These same scholars also critique queer theory's lack of intersectionality, which I now discuss in more detail.

Multi-faceted Intersectionality

In the introduction to their volume on queer theory and communication, Yep, Lovaas, and Elia ("Introduction") note that queer theory "debunks the stability of identity categories by focusing on the historical, social, and cultural constructions of race, class, and gender, among others" (2). While this is an excellent goal that queer theory is equipped to meet and a goal that the editors of this volume meet via the works they have chosen to include, queer theory has not consistently examined intersecting identities. In fact, queer theory in the academy has reinforced the white male (and some female) hegemony of who has, and who is included in, an academic voice. As Johnson notes: Queer theory has "failed to acknowledge consistently and critically the intellectual, aesthetic, and political contributions of nonwhite, non-middle-class gays, bisexuals, lesbians, and transgendered people in the struggle against homophobia and oppression" ("Quare" 130). While Johnson's claim is accurate, scholars in new queer studies, including Johnson, contest this history.

Exemplars of intersectional scholarship in new queer studies include Manalansan's examination of Filipina/o sexuality, gender, and nationality within the contexts of diaspora and globalization. Also, Badruddoja's discussion of sexuality, ethnicity, and U.S. American cultural hegemony illustrates the ways in which new queer studies begins to address intersections of identity, transnationalism, and (im)migration. Even in domestic contexts, new queer scholarship pushes the boundaries of queer theory.

For example, Morgensen's ethnographic study of the Radical Faerie[25] sub-culture explores queer identities that subvert the gay mainstream within a theoretical context that critiques the colonization of sexual minorities in the U.S. Additionally, Schippers uses participant observation to explore how sexuality is queered by heterosexuals within the alternative hard rock music scene. Beyond espousing a more intersectional view of culture and identity, these scholars in new queer studies also address the lack of intersubjective applications of queer theory. Furthermore, Manalansan and Badruddoja's research is part of a larger scholarly conversation that critiques queer theory's unbalanced focus on the West by engaging the intersections of postcolonial theory and queer theory.[26] Communication and performance scholar Alexander ("Queer(y)ing"), also explores this theoretical pairing through the use of personal narrative and film criticism while unpacking intersections of theory and method in order to propose a "critical interpretive queer methodology" (114).

While the intersectionality being employed within new queer studies is promising, we must still acknowledge the shortcomings of queer theory's accounting of people with multiple marginalized positions and the intersecting systems of oppression and privilege that come with those identities (Gamson and Moon). Queer theory's near exclusive focus on heteronormativity is critiqued by Cohen in the following:

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[25] Radical Faeries are a self-described "tribe" of gay men who seek to reclaim indigenous notions of "gay men as bearers of spiritual insight" (Morgensen 68). Rogers states: "The Radial Faerie movement brings the political and spiritual impetus of the androgynous drag queen and the twin-spirit shaman into the nineties" by reclaiming Otherness as a positive part of Radical Faerie identity (35).

[26] The combination of queer and postcolonial theory is explored in various contexts that contribute to new queer studies in Hawley's edited volume, *Post-colonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections*.

Despite its liberatory claim to stand in opposition to static categories of oppression, queer politics and much of queer theory seem in fact to be static in the understanding of race, class, and gender and their roles in how heteronormativity regulates sexual behavior and identities. (36)

As Cohen suggests, new queer studies needs to open up the false binary between hetero- and homosexual, as there are many heterosexual relationships that are not sanctioned or legitimated by heteronormativity. For example, a mother on welfare or a single parent does not meet the expectations of the heteronormative nuclear family. In these instances, queer theory can be employed to examine the ways in which heteronormativity is oppressive to people who do not necessarily identify as gay, lesbian, or queer. The exclusive focus on the hetero/homosexual binary of early queer theory left out people who are heterosexual but may also be "queer" in terms of how their multiple identities, aside from sexual orientation, impact their lived experience. Cohen instructively explains the failures of both identity politics and queer opposition to identity politics in the following:

For those of us who find ourselves on the margins, operating through multiple identities and thus not fully served or recognized through traditional single-identity-based politics, theoretical conceptualizations of queerness hold great political promise. For many of us, the label "queer" symbolizes an acknowledgment that through our existence and everyday survival we embody sustained and multi-sited resistance to systems (based on dominant constructions of race and gender) that seek to normalize our sexuality, exploit our labor, and constrain our visibility. At the intersection of oppression and resistance lies the radical potential of queerness to challenge and bring together those deemed marginal and all those committed to liberatory politics. (24)

Cohen provides an alternative to single-identity-based politics by presenting a more intersectional view of queerness that accounts for multiple identities and how power and agency operate within those identities. Rather than focusing exclusively on heterosexism, Cohen calls for a broader theoretical framework based in social justice when she states

"queer activists who evoke a single-oppression framework misrepresent the distribution

of power within and outside of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered communities,

and therefore limit the comprehensive and transformational character of queer politics"

(25). Cohen proposes a framework where identification is achieved in terms of relative

power position rather than socio-cultural identity:

> I envision a politics where one's relation to power, and not some homogenized
> identity, is privileged in determining one's political comrades. I am talking about
> a politics where the nonnormative and marginal positions of punks, bulldaggers,
> and welfare queens, for example is the basis for progressive transformative
> coalition work. (22)

Rather than organizing around the reductive and exclusive categories of heterosexual and

homosexual, Cohen suggests coalitional activism. Expanding the queer political project

to address issues that intersect with heteronormativity could build the progressive

coalitional politics that many who have been at the margins of social movement after

social movement may be able to rally behind. However, the realization of such a coalition

has been impeded by queer scholars and queer activists who ignore race, class, and

gender—most likely because they are privileged in those areas—and focus exclusively on

sexuality. This is why I argue intersectionality also needs to include self-reflexivity and

an interrogation of privilege by the researcher, a discussion I take up in more detail in

Chapter Three.

<center>Queer Theory and Identity: Contested Terrain</center>

Identity is usually discussed in queer scholarship in the context of critiquing

identity politics rather than as a discrete phenomenon. However, I wish to situate my use

of *identity* within queer theory and within larger cultural studies literature that discusses

identity politics (Alcoff, *Visible*; Alcoff and Mohanty). I begin by reviewing literature

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that explicitly deals with the contested terrain between queer theory and identity politics before turning to literature that discusses conflicts between poststructuralist epistemology and identity politics. Then, I discuss how these separate conversations can be usefully combined.

There is a tension within queer theory that pulls researchers away from exploring identity because queer theory's critique of identity, when taken to its strongest point, makes the concept of identity suspicious. At the heart of the seeming incongruence of queer theory and studies of identity is the fact that "queer theory questions the assumptions that lived experience can be captured and directly represented by researchers" (Gamson, "Sexualities" 355). A queer lens would see a qualitative attempt to investigate the reality of a person's life as being "naïve in their assumptions about social reality" (355), given its constructivist and poststructuralist epistemology. Queer theory views identities as fluid, unfixed, and unstable, which does not easily allow "a researcher to confidently run out and study sexual subjects" (356). One might conclude from this that "identity…cannot be taken as a starting point for social research [and] can never be assumed by a researcher to be standing still, ready for its close-up" (356). Gamson appends his claims by suggesting that scholars study lived experience as "narratives" rather than *true* experiences and see the gendered [and sexualized] self as the result of a "series of ongoing bodily performances" rather than as an autonomous self ("Sexualities" 357), which lays the foundation for my research project that includes personal narrative as methodology. I argue that identities, at the personal level, can be analyzed as narratives that are products of lived subjective experience, which are made meaningful in relation to identities at the cultural and social level into which large groups of people are

categorized (Khayatt). This multi-level view of identity allows critical researchers to connect lived experience to larger political, social, and cultural contexts.

Aside from bridging seemingly disparate epistemological and methodological terrain, queer sociologists have also worked to identify the heuristic value of queer theory in the social sciences. Green notes Sociology already has ways of deconstructing identity and subjectivity (citing symbolic interactionism) that cannot be unproblematically paired with queer theory because of queer theory's radical deconstructionist tendency to erase an observable and discussable self. The poststructuralist tendency of queer theory toward desubjectification creates perilous potential for failure when researchers like those in Sociology, and I would add Human Communication Studies, least partially anchor their research in an empirical world. Especially for scholars working in an interpretivist frame, the self as subject must be acknowledged since we rely on the self to report his or her "reality" to us, the researcher, who will then analyze and interpret it. Queer theory, on the other hand, deconstructs notions of the self, which may lead researchers to ignore or discount participants' interpretation of their reality. Green sums up this tension in the following: "For whereas pragmatist and interactionist approaches typically 'bracket' the question of 'truth' of social categories, privileging instead the lived experience of subjects, queer theory takes the instability of social categories as its starting point, privileging instead the deconstructionist moment" (35). Green continues by making a proposition I take up in this project. Since sexual and gender identities are "constituted in relation to language, culture, religion, [and] law…the deconstructionist lens of queer theory is an invaluable tool" (42) that can serve as a pivot point between analyzing the

self through means of inquiry that are separate from queer theory, and critiquing larger social fields of context and power that effect the social order.

In this project, I use queer theory as a pivot point between my critical historicization and deconstruction of gay bodies, gay politics, and my intersubjective communication with queer-identified participants. Returning to Green's words, utilizing this approach means negotiating a "vital dialectic between the constructionist and reifying tendencies of interpretivism, on the one hand, and the deconstructionist, negating tendencies of queer theory, on the other" (43). In short, by switching our focus from identity to identities, and from autonomous to instable and partial, we can use a queer perspective to problematize representations of the sexual self in political ways (Gamson, "Sexualities" 358-359), while still validating the subjective experiences of our participants. Mutchler, a sociologist, pairs a queer perspective with sexual scripts theory by examining the stories of young men as they relate to sexual practices and HIV/AIDS. His research is a good example of how scholars can "queer" existing intersubjective theories and methods in order to problematize normative notions of gender, sexuality, and culture, within a framework that is action-oriented. Queer sociologists are not the only scholars who have been trying to reconcile poststructuralist theories with identities. Scholars in the Future of Minority Studies Project have also taken up the challenge of re-theorizing identity politics.

Re-theorizing Identity Politics: Bridging Contested Terrain

The poststructuralist view of identity fits within the constructivist tradition that views identities as constituted within discourse and rejects a unified, essential view of identity (Hall, "Who Needs"). While this view partially informs my conceptualization of

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identity, I also join those in minority studies (Alcoff, *Visible*; Alcoff and Mohanty) and new queer studies (Cohen; Johnson) who call on critical scholars to consider more carefully the material consequences of discursively created and mediated identities.

I agree with Alcoff and Mohanty's claim that the poststructuralist critique of identity politics is problematic for people in marginalized communities:

> Theoretical critics of identity politics claim that identities are social constructions rather than natural kinds. They point out, with some justification, that racial categories are specious ways to categorize human beings, that gender differences are overblown, that sexuality should be thought of as a practice rather than an identity, and that disability itself is often the product of social arrangements… (3)

While the authors agree with some critics of identity politics who claim identities rely on arbitrarily constructed categories, they also problematize an antiessentialist stance that denies the effects of such categories. When marginalized people feel in their flesh and bones—their bodies—the material effects of their identities through surveillance, violence, and discrimination, how can we claim identities do not mean? As critics, we need to acknowledge and continue to theorize the social constructedness of identities while validating the experiences of people who do not have the same privileged intellectual perspective we do.

The theoretical tensions between varying views of identity extend beyond queer theory and include theory created by other marginalized people. Alcoff, who focuses primarily on race and gender (*Visible*) notes: "There is often a significant disparity between the way in which identity is characterized by the critics of identity politics and the way in which identities are generally lived or experienced as well as how they actually figure in political movements" (12). Alcoff is wary of identity taking "center stage" and overshadowing systems of discrimination and oppression, but she is also

skeptical of the claim "that identity itself, under any construction, is a problem and even a kind of mistake" (13-14). She advises scholars to skillfully balance their treatment of identity:

> Where the salience of identity is affirmed, it is sometimes all too easy to then concretize identity's impact, to assume clear boundaries, and to decontextualize and dehistoricize identity formations. In reality, identities are much more complex than any of these caricatures will allow. (85)

Taking a more complex view of identity means undertaking more reflexive research that privileges intersectionality, contextualization, and historicization. The tension between validating the lived experience of identity by marginalized groups and critiquing the structures that privilege certain identity groups while oppressing others is one that many critical scholars working in intersections of race and gender have already begun to address.

Alcoff's (*Visible*) conceptualization of "real identities" (84) and Sanchez's "critical realist theory of identity" (31) both attempt to bridge seemingly disparate epistemological terrain between poststructuralist views of identity and more essential views of identity. Rather than setting up these two views of identity as a binary, Alcoff emphasizes the importance of both:

> To be plausible, an account of social identity must be able to account for historical fluidity and instability, as well as the differences within identities, and yet also account for the powerful salience and persistence of identities as self-descriptors and as predictors for how one is treated and what one's realistic life options are. (88)

In this sense, identities are still informed and constituted by historical discourses and fit within Hall's ("Cultural Identity") conception of identity I included in Chapter One. However, Alcoff extends Hall's definition to account for the ways in which identities also

serve as important and "salient" discursive and material markers that affect the daily, lived experience of people. Moya's reemphasizes the notion that identities have material meaning when she states that identities are "socially significant and context-specific ideological constructs that nevertheless refer in non-arbitrary (if partial) ways to verifiable aspects of the social world" (97). While scholars working on issues of gender, race, and identity have noted their suspicions of ongoing critiques of identity politics more so than those in queer studies, some queer scholars have commented on the disconnects between their theorizing of identity and their identities in lived experience.

Queer theory's critiques of the stability of identity and staunch opposition to essential aspects of identity has led some to question the effectiveness of queerness as a political and/or social movement. As Ralph Smith notes: "Queer theory erases gay identity, thereby weakening social justice and civil rights movements, creating a sense of futility about achieving amelioration of conditions for sexual minorities and strengthening the sense of division already endemic among gay advocates" (347). Although essential views of identities have been critiqued as exclusionary, they do provide something more tangible around which to politically organize. While a strong essentialist view of identities becomes rigid, fixed, and exclusive, we can see in Smith's words that queer theory's tendency toward desubjectification and deconstruction is also problematic in that identity becomes too elusive. Echoing this frustration, Gamson ("Reflections") discusses his trouble explaining to students the conception within identity politics that "identities are fictions-made-facts" (386). He noticed his students, even after reading the literature and eventually being attracted to the tenets of queer theory, still "smelled something fishy," and individuals in his life "insisted that their desires and

identities felt quite stable indeed" (387). Although anecdotal, Gamson and Smith's claims point to important issues within queer theory and poststructuralist views of identity in general. However, as I have shown above, bringing together scholarly discussions regarding queer theory and identity, and race and gender and identity offers a bridge between constructivist and essentialist notions of identities through a "critical realist" view of identity (Sanchez).

<center>The Heuristic Value of Queer Theory in Communication Studies</center>

I have presented a review of literature that addresses multiple issues including current critiques of queer theory and queer theory's contested relationship with identity-based research. However, by drawing on sociologists like Gamson and Green, I have identified strategies that can bridge queer theory and identity. By acknowledging Gamson's call to view identities as narratives and drawing on Alcoff and others' work on critical realist theories of identities, we can reframe how we think of identities in order to capitalize on the deconstructive and historicizing power of poststructuralist approaches, like queer theory, while employing intersubjective approaches used in Human Communication Studies to explore lived experience. I conclude that reformulating conceptualizations of identity within a queer theoretical framework that contextualizes and historicizes socio-cultural phenomena in conjunction with critical-interpretive methods, addresses critiques of queer theory overviewed above. For instance, ameliorating some of the barriers between queer theory and identity-based research opens the door for more intersubjective application, which may in turn balance out the textual focus of queer theory with more analysis of lived experience. Second, a more complex understanding of identity may allow, if not mandate, researchers to take an intersectional

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approach. A queer, intersectional, and communicative research framework has the potential to more complexly engage questions of culture and identity, which demonstrates an important heuristic component of queer theory.

What can queer theory add to Communication and where can it lead the field? These questions fundamentally interrogate the heuristic value of queer theory. Communication theory scholar Wood states that heurism is "the most advanced quality of theories" (61). She conceptualizes heurism as "the degree to which a theory provokes new ideas, insights, thinking, and research" (61). I argue that queer theory definitely "sparks new thinking" (61) within Communication and therefore has heuristic value. According to Gamson ("Sexualities"), queer theory has already proven its heuristic value in its ability to challenge "the research agendas of more traditional fields of scholarship" (358). Queer theory's lack of application in Human Communication Studies (Nicholas; Yep, Lovaas, and Elia, "Introduction") is unfortunate, yet it provides queer communication scholars an opportunity to do important work. Gamson ("Sexualities") notes that the "relationship between institutional and the discursive…is undertheorized" and that this has "been exacerbated by the disciplinary divide between social researchers…and humanities scholars" (360). As I mentioned earlier, Human Communication Studies' already "queer" positioning between the social sciences and the humanities leaves scholars well poised to enter into this important realm and to ground Human Communication Studies at the cutting edge of second-generation queer theory or new queer studies.

Queer theory provides the most heuristic value in terms of how cultures and identities are studied from a communication perspective. In both textual/discursive and

lived experience contexts, queer theory provides new ways to think about how sexuality

intersects with other identities in relation to power and history. Queer theory gives us

new lenses through which to view the complex interworkings of culture and especially

how we can connect culture in new, and less essentializing, exclusive, ways to identities.

Johnson and Henderson ("Introduction") make a similar statement: "Given its currency in

the academic marketplace, then, queer studies has the potential to transform how we

theorize sexuality in conjunction with other identity formations" (5). This potential for

transformation demonstrates queer theory's heuristic value in regards to the study of

culture and communication.

My review of literature on queer theory in Human Communication Studies and

the critiques thereof have hopefully shown the promise and complexity of bringing more

queer perspectives into Human Communication Studies. While I conclude that queer

theory is flexible and rigorous enough to offer innovative ways of examining and

critiquing cultural and identity-based communication phenomena, I also believe the

framework queer theory offers is too diffuse and radically deconstructionist to be applied

unproblematically to traditional communication phenomena. I propose that for queer

theory to be most effective in Human Communications Studies that it be paired with a

rigorous contextualization of the communication phenomena being studied and a strong

methodological pairing that complements queer theory's strengths and challenges its

weaknesses.

Research Questions

I further explore the heuristic value of a queer perspective in Human

Communication Studies by answering the following research questions:

RQ1: How do queer men experience their identities in their day-to-day lives?

RQ2: In particular, how do they experience their identities in relationship to their

bodies and personal politics?[27]

RQ3: How do queer men experience their identities in ways that contest and

reproduce mainstream discourses regarding gay male bodies and gay rights

issues?

Aside from asking research questions that are guided by historical and theoretical

context, I also aim to explore new methodological territory. As a critical cultural scholar,

I am committed to a thorough treatment of intersectionality and reflexivity in my

research; therefore, I seek to operationalize a paramethodological approach I term

intersectional reflexivity by answering the following research question:

RQ4: How does a scholarly commitment to intersectional reflexivity manifest

throughout the research process?

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[27] I conceptualize politics in a broad sense that includes personal commitments, beliefs, and values, as well as politics in terms of government and legislation.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PERFORMANCE PARADIGM, PERSONAL NARRATIVE,

AND RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Within the conceptual framework of my research, I join the scholarly

conversation regarding personal narrative as conceptualized through the performance

paradigm. While personal narrative and performance scholars have explored issues of

sexuality in innovative and informative ways (Corey, "Blessed"; Corey, "Personal"; Fox,

"*Negative*"; Fox, "Raging"; Fox, "Skinny"; Gingrich-Philbrook, "What I Know"), I move

from intrasubjective autoethnographic uses of personal narrative to intersubjective

personal narratives. I draw on existing research on personal narrative and performance

ethnography because I use performance ethnography to collect and present personal

narratives. In this chapter, I overview the performance paradigm and then discuss

personal narrative as my primary methodology. My overview of performance and

personal narrative focuses on the philosophy and theory behind my methods and connects

to the previous two chapters' discussions of the importance of historical, social, and

political contextualization. Then, I discuss intersectional reflexivity as a

paramethodological commitment before providing a detailed outline of the research

procedures involved in this project.

The Performance Paradigm

Rather than situating my project within traditional qualitative and ethnographic methods of interviewing, I prefer to ground my project in performance ethnography for two reasons: One, performance ethnography is inherently critical, includes a thorough conceptualization of the importance of the body, and includes reflexivity; and two, the personal narratives I collected were performed in interpersonal settings with my participants, which is distinct from other scholarly uses of personal narratives that are only presented textually.

Performance ethnography was conceptualized by Conquergood in his germinal article "Performing as a Moral Act" but was brought most explicitly to the field of Communication in his pivotal essay, "Rethinking Ethnography" published in *Communication Monographs* in 1991. This paradigmatic approach is well-suited for my project because, based in critical theory, performance ethnography questions traditional modes of inquiry that claim to be apolitical, which is in keeping with queer theory's commitment to radical historicization, deconstructionism, and activism.

Performance ethnography also views identity in a complex way that complements the discussion from Chapter Two regarding critical realist theories of identity. The performance paradigm's critical epistemology informs its view of identity as "invented and contingent" and critiques the notion of a unified subject (Conquergood, "Rethinking" 184). However, the performance paradigm focuses on the body-in-practice, which does not completely erase the possibility of a doer-behind-the-deed. To elaborate, Conquergood cites Victor Turner's notion of human beings as performative, or as "*homo performans*," which directly relates to identity in that the human as performer is "a

culture-inventing, social-performing, self-making and self-transforming creature" (187).

In short, the performance paradigm privileges both a constructivist view of identity that

critiques a self-contained subject and a view of the self as agentic actor involved in

ongoing cultural and social processes.

The performance paradigm is also concerned with context *and* embodiment. In

this sense, the performance paradigm bridges the divide between discourse (context) and

materiality (embodiment) in ways that can address critiques of queer theory's discursive

focus that were outlined in Chapter Two. Furthermore, by using the performance

paradigm, which draws on anthropological methods, I can answer the call for more

application of queer perspectives to lived experience. As Conquergood ("Rethinking")

notes: "The performance paradigm privileges particular, participatory, dynamic, intimate,

precarious, embodied experience grounded in historical process, contingency, and

ideology" (187). Adding the performance paradigm to queer theory pushes toward

intersubjective methods, as "the performance paradigm insists on face-to-face encounters

instead of abstractions and reductions" (187). Conquergood ("Performing") later adds

that "ethnographers work with expressivity, which is inextricable from its human

creators. They must work with real people, humankind alive, instead of printed texts" (2).

All of these tenets of performance ethnography, when paired with queer theory, begin to

ameliorate some of the theoretical and methodological tensions endemic to a pairing of

queer theory and identity.

Performance ethnography also makes research more accessible and equitable by

critiquing the textocentrism of the traditional academic canon and, instead, focusing on

cultural practices in everyday life (Alexander, "Performance"). Performance ethnography

"privileges not only less traditionally accepted practices of theorizing, but also 'other' ways of knowing by challenging the mind/body split" (Calafell, "Disrupting" 179). By privileging the body as a source of knowledge, Calafell notes that performance allows those who have been historically left out of dominant discursive space to legitimate what had been de-legitimated by traditional research as mere "cultural performances" (179).

As the historical tracing in Chapter One suggests, the body, in various contexts, has been abjected as diseased, carnal, and irrational. Bodies belonging to cultural or social groups that have been historically marginalized have been even more prone to othering, as evidenced by the social stratification inherent within the modernist project. A similar tracing is part of the recuperation of the body within Performance Studies, as performance scholars critique the Cartesian dualism that privileged mind over body. The body is both a subject *and* object of research in the performance paradigm: "Another way of saying it is that performance-centered research takes as both its subject matter and method the experiencing body situated in time, place, and history" (Conquergood, "Rethinking" 187). In short, the body attains a special place in the performance paradigm between discourse and materiality, which is especially important in relation to the performance and production of personal narrative.

Personal Narrative

A prominent personal narrative scholar in Communication is Kristen Langellier, and her germinal article, published in 1989, situated personal narrative within the Communication discipline; therefore, her research is a logical place to turn for a solid conceptualization of personal narrative. Langellier ("Personal Narratives") states that personal narratives are a part of everyday communication and are particularly related to

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"performance in everyday life and the culture of everyday talk" (243). While personal narratives are a part of "everyday" talk and culture they should not be homogenized or essentialized. In this sense, *everyday* does not connote *normal* since the everyday talk of marginalized people is still non-normative even as it is an everyday occurrence. Below I outline, in more detail, the importance of personal narratives to marginalized groups.

The personal narratives that surround us take different forms and have different definitions (Langellier, "Personal Narratives"). There are two modes of personal narrative most relevant to my research project. First, is the personal narrative separated from conversation as a linear uninterrupted story shared by a single narrator. While it may be easy to compare this definition to a monologue or soliloquy delivered by an actor on a stage, it is important to note that this type of personal narrative does not have to be performed on a stage or in front of a large audience (Corey, "Personal"). Although separate from regular conversation, this type of personal narrative can be "performed" interpersonally, between two people or on stage in front of many people. The second definition of personal narrative is an interactive mode where personal narratives are co-constructed in communication that "spirals between story and conversation, overlaying and reworking conversational materials in a curvilinear direction" (Peterson and Langellier 139). As I outline later, I first used the interactive, co-constructed style of personal narrative in conversations with my participants. Then, after the narratives were collected, my participants and I interpersonally performed the personal narratives using the separated, single-narrator style. Whether separated from regular conversational flow as a story or co-constructed within a conversation, personal narratives have been theorized in similar ways.

Personal narratives, regardless of what type, are always contextual and can be approached as a "discourse embedded in ongoing social processes" (Langellier, "Personal Narratives" 265). Acknowledging the importance of context, my research explores how the historical, social, and political discourses of othering gay male bodies inform contemporary queer identities and narratives. These contexts have discursive and material effects, as they make meaningful our bodies, thoughts, and feelings—in short, our identities. As Peterson and Langellier note: "personal narratives exist in, through, and across the body" (146). Furthermore, personal narratives, as forms of discourse, depend on our bodies, which act "as our access to and means of expression" (Langellier, "Personal Narrative, Performance" 139). In this sense, the materiality of our bodies, along with our capacity to produce symbols and discourses through communication, combine to constitute stories, which can be analyzed to learn more about particular identities.

Langellier ("Personal Narrative, Performance") states that personal narratives constitute identities and are sites "where the social is articulated, structured, and struggled over" (128). The notion of struggle is an important part of personal narrative research, especially when the research involves marginalized cultures and identities. Langellier notes that personal narratives constitute identity within the cultural contexts of "sex, class, race, ethnicity, geography, religion, and so on," which is "why personal narrative performance is especially crucial to those communities left out of the privileges of the dominant culture, those bodies without voice in the political sense" (129). These quotations illustrate the ways in which personal narrative research is committed to interrogating intersectionality within discursive and material contexts, which is in line

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with my scholarly commitments. They also show the relevance of personal narratives to marginalized groups.

Personal narrative, as a methodology, has implications for groups who have been historically marginalized (Corey, "Personal"; Langellier, "Personal Narrative, Performance"), as their voices can find public space in order to contest dominant narratives. Corey ("Personal") notes that "the narrative…is a literary form ideal for lives governed by silence" (249). Corey, noticing as a young person that his queer identity was not present within society's "master narrative," felt shame about his identity. He internalized the "master narrative [which] is a dominant cultural discourse that serves to keep gay men and lesbians as sinners, outside the realm of morality" (251). However, Corey found empowerment in his personal narrative—especially positioned against the master narrative. He writes:

> The personal narrative is one way of disturbing the master narrative, and through the performative dimensions of the personal narrative, the individual is able to disrupt—and dare I say *rewrite*—the master narrative…The heteronormative narrative is public, historical, documented, and hegemonic. The master narrative is an artillery of moral truth, and the personal narrative defixes that truth…Each queer has a little story, but in the spirit of postmodernism, a little difference becomes a lot of discourse. (250)

Here we can see that the master narrative, which colludes with dominant ideology, is not uncontestable. Rather, the postmodern condition that questions master narratives opens up discursive spaces for agency. Langellier ("Personal Narratives") concludes that "all personal narratives are ideological because they evolve from a structure of power relations and simultaneously produce, maintain, and reproduce that power structure" (267). This view of ideology as contested and contestable is important as it differs from a heavy-handed view of ideology as false-consciousness and opens up a space for agency.

Therefore, narratives do not only "function as an ideological device to legitimate the meaning systems of dominant groups…they also delegitimate or contest dominant meaning systems" (268). I explore this process in detail in Chapter Four when I examine how queer identities contests dominant discourses of sexuality, gender, the body, and politics.

Bodies cannot be divorced from historical discourses, which Corey illustrates when connecting the citationality of the gay man's body to the master narrative, which defines the "gay man's body as a house of evil" ("Personal" 251). He continues: "The gay man's body is inscribed with disease…and he has brought disease upon himself by virtue of his sexuality" (251). Corey's powerful words support the argument I outlined in Chapter One regarding how historical discourses of othering, which are based on sexual surveillance and regulation of "deviance," are still meaningful and present in contemporary social and political discourses regarding gay male bodies.

<div align="center">Performativity, Personal Narrative, and the Body</div>

Having already established historical, theoretical, and methodological contexts, I add a final theoretical layer that brings these contexts together through a discussion of performativity. Langellier ("Personal Narrative, Performance") claims that personal narrative, aside from needing to be acknowledged contextually, also benefits from a coupling with theory:

> Approaching personal narrative as performance requires theory which takes context as seriously as it does text, which takes the social relations of power as seriously as it does individual reflexivity, and which therefore examines the cultural production and reproduction of identities and experience. ("Personal Narratives" 128)

Langellier specifically cites performativity as a useful theoretical partner for personal narrative, which draws upon the influential work of Judith Butler (*Excitable*; *Gender*). While I specifically join the scholarly conversation regarding performativity as it is employed by queer scholars (Johnson, "Quare") and personal narrative scholars (Langellier, "Personal Narrative, Performance"), I briefly overview Butler's scholarship on performativity below.

Judith Butler's (*Gender*) expansion on the theory of performativity, which was introduced by Austin, accounts for the constitutive relationship among gestures, enactments, discourse, identity, and the body. The body is performative in two senses: One, it constitutes identity through "doing" or engaging in talk and interaction, and two, it reproduces meaning and is meaningfully reproduced through discourse (Judith Butler, "Performative Acts"). In other words, performativity focuses on how the bodily gestures and enactments that one performs build upon existing iterations of stylized acts while simultaneously reifying or rupturing meaning that has sedimented over time. Gender, sexuality, race, and other cultures and identities become "intelligible" (Judith Butler, *Undoing*) through performativity, which highlights the ways in which socio-cultural identities are constructed, or constituted, rather than ahistorical or transcendental.

The performance paradigm and the theory of performativity both critically focus on the body within social and cultural contexts. Specifically discussing the connection between performativity and personal narrative, Langellier ("Personal Narrative, Performance") states:

> Without performativity…personal narrative risks being a performance practice without a theory of power to interrogate what subject positions are culturally available, what texts and narrative forms and practices are privileged, and what

discursive contexts prevail in interpreting experience. Without it we are vulnerable to the charge that performance makes no difference, that it leaves all material and social conditions unchanged. Performativity asks us to recognize and realize the potential of the performance paradigm. (135)

Performativity theoretically connects the body, culture, and identity, as it is through our bodily participation in performance and personal narrative that "we discover a multiplicity of lived relations we could discover in no other way" (147). Aside from self-discovery, Langellier points out the emancipatory potential of personal narrative to influence inequitable social and material conditions in the pursuit of social justice.

Johnson further extends notions of performativity further, bringing the body into new iterations of queer theory with the introduction of "quare." He states: "As a disciplinary expansion, then, I wish to 'quare' 'queer' such that ways of knowing are viewed both as discursively mediated and as historically situated and materially conditioned" (127). Johnson's conception of "quare" is connected to race in that he recuperates a historical *and* material history of queerness that is uniquely tied to experiences by people who are sexual *and* racial minorities; a perspective that is lacking in whitewashed queer theory. Echoing a common critique of queer theory, Johnson notes that queer theorists have "ground[ed] their critique in the discursive rather than the corporeal" (132) and offers an alternative:

> The body, I believe, has to be theorized in ways that not only describe the ways in which it is brought into being but also what it *does* once it *is* constituted and the relationship between it and the other bodies around it. In other words, I desire a rejoinder to performativity that allows a space for subjectivity, for agency (however momentary and discursively fraught), and, ultimately, for change.

Johnson's conceptualization of how the body should be viewed performatively within a queer or "quare" theoretical frame addresses earlier cited criticisms that queer theory

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needs to bridge discourse and materiality, apply poststructuralist theory to lived experience, and acknowledge the historical contextualization of bodies. Johnson's poignant theoretical connections inform my dissertation project, and I agree that bringing together queer theory, performance, and performativity offers a robust way to (re)articulate and analyze identities.

To summarize, personal narrative as conceptualized by Langellier and other prominent scholars is situated within the performance paradigm and critically examines the context and power relations that surround the production of personal narrative. The discussion above illustrates the fruitful connections to be made among performance, personal narrative, performativity, and queer theory. Furthermore, these connections create a theoretical and methodological framework that allows me to explore queer identity through personal narrative in critical, reflexive, and intersectional ways. Given the lack of research on queer identity using intersubjective methods, the combination of personal narrative and queer theory can offer much insight into the lived experience of queer-identified men. As Langellier ("Personal Narratives") notes: "The future of personal narrative performance will be shaped by continuing to critically question how it embodies cultural conflict about experience and identity and renders it discussable" (140). My project begins to answer this call for future research in that I explore conflict between gay identities and queer identities *and* conflict within queer identities.

The use of personal narrative in research on and with historically marginalized groups makes it an especially promising methodology for scholars committed to social change, but it also increases the personal and political stakes for researcher and researched as they both tread the landscape of vulnerability. Next, I outline how a

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commitment to intersectional reflexivity may make for more ethical and accountable research on culture and identity.

<div align="center">Intersectional Reflexivity as Paramethodology</div>

Aside from my primary methodological considerations, I include a paramethodological commitment to intersectional reflexivity, which I conceptualize as a simultaneous commitment to intersectionality and self-reflexivity that is present throughout the research process and in the final scholarly product. While I developed this concept independently, I have since found it used in one other context (Harrington). Harrington's use of intersectional reflexivity is in keeping with the conceptualization that I have developed; namely, that it is important to be reflexive about the systems of privilege and oppression that come with our own and with our participants' identities. Harrington notes she reached her conceptualization of intersectional reflexivity in hindsight, after leaving the field, so my aim is to operationalize the concept throughout my dissertation project. As I outline below, many scholars have theorized notions of intersectionality and reflexivity and there are obvious points of overlap between the two concepts when they are separated. Therefore, I do not claim to be the originator of these important concepts; rather, I combine the concepts in order to create a paramethodological research component. While I have not found the term *paramethodology* used as an explicit methodological concept, my use of it is straightforward. I conceptualize paramethodology as a complement to the primary methodology being used in a research project. In this case, intersectional reflexivity complements my primary method of personal narrative and serves as an agent through which I plan to address the critiques of queer theory mentioned earlier.

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Intersectionality is complex and not easy to unpack, even though the word has become fashionable in academic jargon. A thorough commitment to intersectionality makes for tough work, tough writing, and tough reading, but, including intersectionality as part of one's scholarly commitments is a worthy pursuit. Intersectionality at its best already includes reflexivity, which may make my pairing of the terms seem redundant. However, intersectionality and reflexivity have various conceptualizations and have been employed in numerous ways, which makes a single understanding of the terms problematic. Below, I chart the genealogy of intersectionality and review existing literature on reflexivity.

McCall suggests "intersectionality is the most important theoretical contribution that women's studies, in conjunction with related fields, has made so far" (1771); Phoenix and Pattynama rightly point out that intersectionality was employed by feminist scholars before the term was explicitly used by Crenshaw in the late 1980s/early 1990s ("Demarginalizing"; "Mapping the Margins") and then adopted by others. Feminist inquiry into the social relations of being a woman, being black, and being a lesbian, for example, was an attempt to account for multiple social positions and how power operates between and within those positions (Phoenix and Pattynama 187). However, intersectionality has been iterated in multiple ways and sometimes "inconsistently" (188). An early iteration of intersectionality was employed from a multicultural or identity-politics perspective that uncritically accepted socio-cultural categories (McCall 1780). This additive model of intersectionality sought inclusion; however, it essentialized the interrelated complexities that emerge between and within identities and did not account for power, privilege, or oppression. Seeking inclusion by adding socio-cultural identities

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separated by commas and placing an "etc." at the end was a discursive and political move critiqued by Judith Butler (*Gender* 182-183) for reifying identity politics while simultaneously suggesting limitless signification.

Critics of the additive model of intersectionality, like Judith Butler, favor an approach to intersectionality that McCall labels *anticategorical* (1773), which emerged in the 1980s as poststructuralist theories and theorists "launched assaults on the validity of modern analytical categories" (1776). The anticategorical model of intersectionality draws upon poststructuralist epistemology that views fixed identity categories as "social fictions" (1773). In this sense, the use of socio-cultural categories is "suspect because they have no foundation in reality," as they are discursively created (1777). Since this model of intersectionality is most often employed through deconstructionist methods like literary criticism, it cannot easily account for intersectionality in lived experience, since it eliminates identity categories as a conceptual starting point. This model of intersectionality fits within the epistemology of queer theory, as it erases identity categories and focuses on discourse as opposed to materiality. Just as queer scholars of color have critiqued the desubjectification of early queer theory, feminists of color critiqued the anticategorical model of intersectionality.

Feminists of color were instrumental in bringing about another iteration of intersectionality that McCall labels *intracategorical* (1773) through their critique of "white feminists' use of *women* and *gender* as unitary and homogenous categories reflecting the common essence of all women" (1776), and their critique of antiessentialist views of identity that erased the subject. The intracategorical model of intersectionality "acknowledges the stable and even durable relationships that social categories

represent…[while] also maintaining a critical stance toward categories" (1774). Rather than solely focusing on the deconstruction of dominant discourses, this model examines complexity within particular marginalized groups or individuals by focusing on specific perhaps under-studied intersections within lived experience. This model of intersectionality is demonstrated in the works of feminists of color like Crenshaw, Collins, hooks, and Anzaldúa.

Crenshaw is credited for coining the term *intersectionality* in 1989 and expanding on it in her 1991 essay "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" in which she describes, among many other examples, how racism and patriarchy intersect to influence the perception of rape, and how women of color have been subordinated in both feminist and antiracist movements (1265). Crenshaw also discusses the importance of representational intersectionality, which examines the cultural construction that occurs through popular cultural, as well as structural intersectionality, which examines how multiple identities have material consequences in the day-to-day lives of marginalized people.[28] Explicit within Crenshaw's conceptualization of intersectionality is the hope that it may facilitate coalitional activism as people who occupy different marginalized social positions realize complicated interconnections between themselves (1299), which pre-dates Cohen's call for coalitional activism cited in Chapter Two. Crenshaw also critiques the essentialist brand of identity politics that is exclusive and oppressive as well as the antiessentialist

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[28] I employ both of these types of intersectionality in my dissertation project. In Chapter One, I overviewed mainstream representations of gay male bodies and gay rights discourses and in Chapter Four I analyze parts of the narratives I collected in relation to those representations (representational intersectionality). In Chapter Four, I also examine the ways in which intersecting identities have materially affected my participants, primarily through their bodies (structural intersectionality).

critiques of identity politics, or as she puts it "vulgar constructionism," which claims

identities do not exist (1297). Crenshaw's theorizing of identity in this case also pre-dates

the critical realist theory of identity outlined in Chapter Two. While I, and many others,

draw much from Crenshaw's influential essay, there are other scholars who have

contributed to the genealogy of intersectionality.

Collins' germinal academic work on Black feminist thought arose from ongoing

critical discussions of intersectionality within Black feminist circles like the Combahee

River Collective who started meeting in 1974 and whose political statement reads: "…we

are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual and class

oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and

practice based upon the fact that major systems of oppression are interlocking (264)."

Collins' conceptualization of the "matrix of domination" accounts for the intersecting

systems of oppression that come with different identities within and between contexts,

and connects to the Collective's calls to complicate how oppressions are viewed. Collins

distinguishes her concept from intersectionality in that intersectionality refers to

"particular forms of intersecting oppression" while the matrix of domination explores

how structural elements of power "reappear across quite different forms of oppression"

(18). Collins' concept skillfully captures the complexity of and variance within

intersections of identities, as individuals dialectically balance and negotiate identities on

different axes through which they experience domination and contest domination. This

complex view of intersectionality allows researchers to explore how different

intersections become more salient in regards to mind and body in varied contexts. Collins

provides an instructive example:

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> Because oppression is constantly changing, different aspects of an individual U.S. Black woman's self-definitions intermingle and become more salient: Her gender may be more prominent when she becomes a mother, her race when she searches for housing, her social class when she applies for credit, her sexual orientation when she is walking with her lover, and her citizenship status when she applies for a job. In all of these contexts, her position in relation to and within intersecting oppressions shifts. (274-275)

Collins' three-dimensional view of intersectionality exceeds the two-dimensional metaphor of a literal intersection and accounts for power, context, and agency.

Two other influential feminists of color who impacted scholarship on intersectionality are hooks and Anzaldúa. hooks' (*Talking Back*) conceptualization the politics of domination is inherently intersectional in that she critiques "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy;" focusing explicitly on the multiple forms of oppression that universally affect marginalized people. By combining classism, racism, and sexism in one concept, hooks highlights how forms of oppression are inextricably linked and should be accounted for within critical research and theorizing. Anzaldúa explores intersectionality through personal narrative and poetry by recounting her experiences as a child of the borderlands within Aztlán. Aside from noting geographical borders and interrogating colonization of the land and the mind, Anzaldúa also discusses the borderland between her Chicana and queer identities, and her experiences navigating multiple marginalized identities in relation to her family and to her academic career. All of the scholars cited above have been influential in moving the conversation regarding intersectionality from an additive model focused in identity politics and multi-culturalism, to the antiessentialist model that deconstructs the discourses that constitute social categories, to the three-dimensional model that interrogates power, acknowledges

and critiques the salience of socio-cultural categories, and explores material and discursive effects of identities in lived experience.

While intersectionality is lauded, as evidenced by its proliferation in scholarly discourses, it is also critiqued. Ludvig, for instance, claims intersectionality is too complex to be useful as a mode of theorizing and Yuval-Davis claims multiple forms of oppression (i.e., racism, classism, and sexism) should not be conflated with or reduced to each other. Both of these feminist scholars also state that researchers must acknowledge certain socio-cultural identity categories are more salient for individuals in particular contexts and then privilege those identities in their research. Verloo and Yuval-Davis also claim intersectionality must be made less complex and more focused on specific identities in order to be useful for policy development and social change, which is reminiscent of Spivak's notion of strategic essentialism. While these criticisms are not aimed at any particular model of intersectionality, they represent the ongoing debate and growth relevant to this important and influential theoretical concept.

It is important to note that intersections of identities exist whether or not they are explicitly discussed in the research. I do not assume that all research should take an intersectional approach, but I believe an intersectional approach increases our understanding of the complexity of cultures and identities. When cultures and identities are not viewed in complex ways, the theorizing and research that results can be exclusionary and end up reinforcing oppression. A stellar example of the theoretical and activist potential of rigorous intersectionality is Stockdill's 2003 book, *Activism Against AIDS: At the Intersections of Sexuality, Race, Gender, and Class*. Stockdill skillfully includes intersectional theory informed by Black feminist theory in order to unpack the

social, cultural, and political contexts surrounding the AIDS pandemic in ways that exceed a focus on medicalization and move toward broad-based social change.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the privileged perspectives of some queer theorists may have influenced their focus on heterosexism and led them to ignore classism, racism, and/or sexism (Cohen). While queer theory subverts essentialized notions of identity, it has also overlooked some important aspects of intersectionality that inform, especially, those who occupy multiple marginalized positions. The genealogy of intersectionality I traced above accounts for intersections of multiple identities and the systems of oppression that come with them, but it is important to also focus on the advantages, or privileges, that come with identities. Here is where reflexivity becomes germane. A commitment to intersectionality and reflexivity requires researchers to explore their privileges and their disadvantages, which will, in turn, broaden the scope of their research. As the boundaries between intersectionality and reflexivity begin to blur in my discussion it is important to have a solid conceptualization of reflexivity, which I derive from performance studies scholars.

Reflexivity is distinct from and more potent than reflection (Bauman). While reflection shows ourselves to ourselves, reflexivity raises consciousness about ourselves when we see ourselves (Meyerhoff). In this sense, reflexivity mandates that we are critical of our reflection and of our positionality in ways that implicate ourselves. At the level of implication, we must acknowledge the power differentials between researcher and researched and acknowledge the privileges and disadvantages that come with our

multiple identities.[29] A lack of reflexivity by many queer theorists led to the critiques of queer theory's lack of intersectionality that I cited earlier.

Queer theorists who critiqued the fixing of their sexual orientation identity without questioning their whiteness, maleness, or class status missed something in their interrogation of cultural difference. As a queer researcher, I cannot solely focus on how I am oppressed by heteronormativity without also acknowledging the ways in which I am privileged. Although I identify as queer, I am also white, male, able-bodied, and educated. These identities bring systems of privilege to bear on my queerness in ways that cannot be ignored or suppressed. As someone engaged in the new queer studies, who readily critiques the white male hegemony of queer theory and the academy, it is important that I acknowledge and critique *my* intersecting identities in a reflexive way. Queer theory's exclusion of certain voices could well have been avoided if scholars would have exercised a commitment intersectional reflexivity.

Scholars in the new queer studies demonstrate self-reflexivity in powerful ways. As Martinez instructs: "the critical perspective I have come to hold is a critique I know *because I have been* (perhaps still am, at least part of) *what I critique*" (111). Martinez further articulates the connection between academic research, self-reflexivity, and our everyday lives. When we are or allow ourselves to be implicated in the "perpetuation of racisms [and other –isms] and their violences in the concrete everyday lives we live—we are faced with a choice" to confront or ignore it (119). Confronting our own complicity in oppressive practices is never going to be the easier of the two choices; however, if cultural critics expect their students and society at large to be critical and reflexive

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[29] For exemplars of self-reflexivity that blur, or queer, the divide between academic and personal see Behar, Calafell ("Pro-reclaiming"), Mendoza ("Tears"), Taylor, and Warren ("Absence").

thinkers, then critics must also be willing to implicate themselves. Martinez continues on to imply that the "ivory tower" is not immune from the influence of dominant discourses and that our privileged intellectual position is not neutral or innocent: "Being a postmodern theorist, or doing postmodern theorizing, does not inoculate one against our culturally based preferences for liberalism and individualism as they are carried in the concrete practices of our habitual life" (119). Here, Martinez challenges scholars to exercise self-reflexivity because we are not separate from the scholarship we produce and because our daily lives effect how we approach our research whether we are conscious of it or not. In order for scholars to employ rigorous intersectionality, they must be self-reflexive about their own identities as well as their intellectual practices. This internal reflexivity becomes especially important when one is engaging in research with human participants and, because of this, scholars in performance ethnography and personal narrative have written much about self-reflexivity in regards to the politics of research.

Conquergood issues an instructive warning to performance ethnographers: "Potential performers of ethnographic materials should not enter the field with the overriding motive of 'finding some good performance material'" ("Performing" 6). Madison ("Performance, Personal Narratives") echoes this sentiment when she asks researchers to question their investment in "the other" and to continuously balance the many dynamics that affect a researcher/researcher and performer/audience relationship (278). Personal narrative performance and performance ethnography offer researchers an opportunity to take intimate looks at themselves and others, which should be done with cautious self-reflexivity that not only examines, but also implicates researcher and researched. The importance of reflexivity builds on scholarly commitments within the

performance paradigm that I cited earlier: namely, a critique of the politics of representation within traditional research that claims to be apolitical. Spry offers the concept, *performative-I*, as a reference to the dialogic way in which ethnography and performance interact with each other in order to interrupt hegemonic forces and ways of thinking through research practices that include reflexive listening, co-performing, and performative writing. This powerful concept illustrates the ways in which self-reflexivity holds researchers accountable for their intellectual choices and to their participants in ways that facilitate the production of research aimed at social change.

Langellier ("Personal Narrative") reiterates "all personal narratives have a political function in that they produce a certain way of seeing the world which privileges certain interests…over others" (271). She also cautions researchers "to be ethically responsible in studying personal narratives, [taking] care not to reproduce in scholarship the social differences…that mark Otherness and participate in oppressive systems" (271). In this sense, researchers must be self-reflexive, not only in regards to their academic choices and practices, but also in regards to their responsibility to produce scholarship that promotes social justice and avoids reifying oppression. While engaging in performance ethnography or performance of personal narrative demands responsibility and accountability to the other, it also creates a space of possibility. Corey ("On Possibility") notes that his position as a gay man in a heterosexist world creates the possibility for him to construct a cultural text that counters the historical narrative that views the gay body as a suspicious object for surveillance. In essence, the reflexivity that is already inherent in the performance paradigm creates the possibility for "others" to talk back to dominance from their own position and experience.

Being self-reflexive also means exposing contradictions, oftentimes within yourself, and dealing with them. Part of my research process and doctoral level training in culture, identity, and performance has involved writing my own personal narrative and engaging in self-reflexive autoethnographic writing. Furthermore, I have chosen to make my reflexive writing, where I interrogate and struggle with my own identities and privileges, public through performances in order to receive feedback from my peers and the community. Queer theorists have also acknowledged the contradictions between their scholarly practice and their lived experience. Gamson ("Reflections") states the following about his relationship to queerness and gayness: "I identify with, and as, both: the guy who just happens to be gay and wants to be treated like everybody else, and the guy who has never wanted to let normality push him around. I live in both, never quite wanting to stay in one for good" (389). Tony Slagle ("Ferment") comments on his seemingly non-queer life as a monogamously coupled middle-class man:

> In many ways, I can be accused of the assimilationist strategy of which I have been so critical. I do not deny that I have benefited directly from gay rights theory and activism, although I have opposed these approaches and will continue to do so. Instead, I will continue to think critically, and voice my concerns, about the implications of such an approach for those who continue to feel outside of the gay rights movement. (325)

Perhaps acknowledging and living with contradiction is one of the queerest things one can do, and something I am still learning to embrace instead of ignore. However, pairing queer theory with the performance paradigm allows me to interrogate that space within myself and to investigate whether or not that space exists in other men who identify as queer.

Above, I have demonstrated how a complex conceptualization of intersectionality can and should be paired with reflexivity. Ranging from intersecting identities within research and participant to interrelated systems of oppression and privilege, intersectional reflexivity is a promising paramethodological concept. I will offer conclusions regarding the utility of intersectional reflexivity in Chapters Four and Five and now turn to a discussion of my research procedures.

Research Procedures

In order to outline the research procedures I used for this project, I will discuss how I recruited participants, the criteria for participation, definitions of personal narrative, the process of co-constructing personal narratives, and the process of participant feedback and analysis through performance of personal narratives.

During my time in Denver, I worked within GLBTQ communities and made many connections through which I was able to announce my call for participants. Using a snowballing technique to recruit participants (Biernacki and Waldorf), I interviewed five queer-identified men with diverse demographics and identities, whom I will introduce further in Chapter Four.

I purposefully chose to narrow two of my demographic criteria, and I conceptualized these two main criteria—identifying as queer and male—in the broadest sense. I expected participants to identify explicitly as *queer*, meaning that *queer* was not used as a synonym for *gay*. Because of the fluid nature of the label *queer* it can be employed in many different ways. For example, people can identify as heterosexual and queer if they feel their practices of heterosexuality are outside of normative standards— for example BDSM, polyamory, or non-monogamy—and/or they have radical politics,

such as Anarchists, that position them outside the mainstream. There are also people who identify as both gay and queer but do not use the terms interchangeably. In any case, people were able to participate as long as queer was used as an explicit identification and not conflated with another identity term like gay.

I also asked that participants identify as male. Their avowed identity was more important to me than the gender they were assigned at birth. For example, a person who was assigned female sex at birth but now identifies as male—a trans man—would be able to participate. There were no other restrictions for participation, and I sought to have a diverse sample in terms of race, class, age, ethnicity, and ability. My rationale for limiting participation to queer males and not including queer females is due to: One, the specific history of othering that gay and queer male bodies carry with them that is not shared by lesbians or bisexuals; and two, the fact that my research is heavily influenced by my own experiences and positionality as a queer-identified male. After receiving approval from the university's institutional review board, the next step in my research project, after identifying participants, was to meet with each participant three times, with each meeting lasting approximately 90 minutes. At the beginning of each meeting, I obtained informed consent (See Appendix A). All meetings were audio-recorded and the recordings were later transcribed.

In the initial two meetings with participants, I utilized the "interactive mode" of personal narrative where narratives are co-constructed in conversation (Peterson and Langellier). This type of data collection is also used in ethnographic methodologies that are peripheral to the performance paradigm. For example, Goodall, who writes in what he terms the "new ethnography," states this type of personal narrative is marked by "mutual

self-disclosure" where people "explain or retell pivotal events" (104). While there are points of overlap between the methods I used and methods used by qualitative researchers and ethnographers, I connect to the performance paradigm through the theoretical and epistemological grounding outlined earlier in this chapter.

During the first meeting, I provided several general and standard prompts to facilitate the co-construction of personal narratives (see Appendix B). After the first meeting, I reviewed the transcripts closely and identified particular segments for elaboration. I notated the transcripts in the margins, usually asking, "Could you give more detail about this?" or "Do you have a story that goes with this?" I then delivered the transcripts to the participants and scheduled our next meeting. During this time, the participants were able to think of more details and reflect on our previous conversation. During the second meeting, our conversations were more personal in that they focused on the narrating of specific stories.

Between the second and third meetings, I combined the transcripts from the previous two meetings. In this process, I removed my voice from the transcripts in order to transform it into a separate, uninterrupted personal narrative. I merged the details, from our second meeting, into the first transcript resulting in one narrative for each participant. In the third and final meeting, my participants and I brought their words to life. Either I or the participant read the narrative aloud. Since the narratives were quite lengthy, sometimes we divided the performance of narrative by each reading half. This performance, at the interpersonal level, also created an opportunity for the participants to give me feedback on my representation of their stories and allowed them to reflect on the research process and their experience hearing their narrative. While the practice of

seeking intersubjectivity with one's research participants draws upon established qualitative methods of member-checks/validation (Lincoln and Guba; Tedlock), the co-performance of personal narratives that my participants and I engaged in during our final meeting was made more intersubjective and participant-oriented through the relationship between text, performance, and audience. During the final meeting, the participants approved most, if not all, of the narratives I presented to them. However, I was asked to keep some stories private; therefore, they will not be included in any public presentation of my research.

After the final meeting, I analyzed the narratives that had been approved by my participants in relation to my research questions, which focus on the everyday experience of queer identity in relation to the body and politics, and how those relationships reproduce and contest mainstream representations of gay male identity. Within these larger themes derived from my research questions, I looked for emergent sub-themes that supplemented or augmented my initial questions. My goal was not to code or analyze the narratives at small units of analysis, because I wanted to preserve the rich and performative aspects of the narratives, and heed Alasuutari's caution that over-coding can "annihilate" the storyline of a narrative (373). Instead, I use descriptive narrative analysis, which examines narratives more holistically and allows researchers to theorize connections between social worlds and identity as expressed in narrative (Whitty).

In this chapter, I outlined the performance paradigm and how its privileged positioning of the body and foundation in critical inquiry are suitable for my project. I also discussed, in detail, the ways in which personal narrative can serve as an empowering methodology for marginalized people by highlighting subjective experience

while still interrogating historical, political, and social contexts. Next, I overviewed the genealogy of intersectionality in conjunction with a discussion of the importance of self-reflexivity in order to conceptualize my paramethodological commitment to intersectional reflexivity. Lastly, I outlined my research procedures and research goals. Now, I turn to the presentation and analysis of the narratives I collected.

CHAPTER FOUR

QUEER NARRATIVES AND QUEER LIVED EXPERIENCE

In this chapter, I present the narratives I collected along with analysis and description in order to address the research questions I posed in Chapter Two. My research questions were purposefully broad, so I include subsections representing emergent themes within each main section of analysis. I address intersectional reflexivity, from the fourth research question, throughout the analysis and finally offer conclusions regarding interrelations among intersectional reflexivity, queer consciousness, and coalitional activism.

I present the narratives using performative writing, which exceeds formal conventions of style and acknowledges language is not innocent or apolitical (Pollock, "Performative Writing"). Further, through my use of performative writing, I seek to avoid an authoritarian tone of ownership over the words on the page (Pollock, "Performative 'I'"). Instead, I draw on Pollock's notion of the "performative 'I'" by acknowledging that my words, my texts, exceed the page in ways that may reinforce oppression or create spaces of possibility. I also aim to speak for myself and *with*[30] my participants in ways that go beyond our queer identities and move toward intersectionality. My hope, as inspired by Pollock and Russo, is that the provisional and sometimes conflicting narratives within this chapter may create the possibility for "new points of identification

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[30] Again, I reference Alcoff ("Problem") and acknowledge that the politics of speaking, positionality, and accountability should be inherent in critical research involving marginalized people and groups.

and alliance" and "new political…coalitions of bodies" ("Performative 'I'" 252) that transcend singular identity politics in favor of coalitional activism. In short, I acknowledge and privilege the power inherent in the relationship among performer, text, and audience to transform how researcher, researched, and reader view others and ourselves.[31]

In order to make the writing more evocative, affective, critical, and creative (Pollock, "Performative Writing" 80-81), I present the words on the page in a way that captures the cadence and mood of the speaker. The personal nature and depth of the stories are rendered more meaningful when the reader can find resonance with the words—can actually imagine or hear them being spoken—by taking performative cues from spacing, punctuation, and changes in font.[32] My use of performative writing also represents the politics that guide my research. I describe the presented narratives as co-constructed because I do not approach research as a detached observer. I acknowledge that my presence and interaction with my participants effects how personal narratives are communicatively constituted, and I acknowledge that the choices I make in the process of researching and writing are political, and affect how the personal narratives are rendered in the scholarly products I produce. In this case, the analysis is not intended to impose

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[31] The relationships among performer, text, and audience are multi-faceted rather than facile. I, as an author of this dissertation co-produce this text with my participants, and each of us bring to bare texts from our own experiences to this process through intextextuality. Additionally, the reader as audience brings his or her intertextuality to this text. Through the research process, my participants and I also acted as performer and audience, just as the reader now becomes a co-performer through the process of engaging the text. In this sense, the lines between researcher, participant, and reader become blurred and we are all co-authors, performers, and audience members of multiple texts that converge and diverge within the literal dissertation text being now presented to you.

[32] I present the narratives on the page using the following changes in type and punctuation for words or phrases: *Italics* signify vocal emphasis, volume, or intensity; a-hyphen-between-words signifies increase in speaking rate; … signifies a momentary pause; and a space between lines signifies a longer pause or a change in topic.

objective understanding; rather, it is filtered through my subjective experiences, which I foreground instead of leaving implicit.

Performative writing also engages the politics of voice. Beyond co-constructing personal narratives, my participants and I were co-performers. During our conversations, we narrated a space of possibility where our queer identities and queer politics could talk back to hegemonic, heteronormative, and homonormative discourses (Corey, "On Possibility). Beyond this discursive space, our interpersonal co-performance of the narratives during our final meetings exceeded the text by bringing our bodies into action. Embodied intersubjective interaction is at the heart of performance ethnography, as it creates a space where performer/narrator, text, and audience are put into dialogue in order to reach cultural understanding in an ethical and reciprocal way (Conquergood, "Performing" 10). Conquergood's conceptualization of the "dialogic performative" instructively outlines the importance of reciprocal intersubjectivity:

> This performative stance struggles to bring together different voices, world views, value-systems, and beliefs so that they can have a conversation with one another…It is a kind of performance that resists conclusions, it is intensely committed to keeping the dialogue between performer and text open and ongoing. (9)

A dialogue of this sort requires researchers to minimize the hierarchy that often exists between researcher and researched in order to co-construct "data" and validate the experiences of one's participants. So even though I, as the researcher, asked questions and guided the narratives, I tried to subvert the tendency to distance myself from my participants; instead, I shared my own experiences as a queer male within our discussions and now include my self-reflexive narratives in the analysis. However, my writing is subjective beyond the notion of the self-centered writer as subject, as I acknowledge that

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my subjectivity is simultaneously bound and contingent with that of my participants and with the reader. The spirit of dialogue through which I engage my research and writing enhances these multi-faceted relationships.

I seek to give the voices of my queer participants a prominent place in my analysis. The lack of personal stories from an explicitly queer perspective is unfortunate, but I find inspiration in existing stories of non-normative sexuality that are rich and informative, albeit not within an explicitly queer framework. Two such works are *Farm Boys: Lives of Gay Men from the Rural Midwest* by Fellows and *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South: An Oral History* by Johnson. Both of these works include stories and struggles of men growing up and into their sexuality and how their lives were shaped by influences such as race, class, and geography. Both of these books are presented as oral histories rather than as research and analysis, as the authors provide an introduction for the stories and present them without overbearing analysis in order to preserve the voices of the participants. The third volume I draw from is titled *That's Revolting!: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation* edited by Mattilda (aka Matt Bernstein Sycamore), which provides a radical queer perspective on current events and socio-cultural issues. While presented more as a queer political manifesto, the individual authors offer implicit analysis of what it means to be a queer person. For the purposes of making literature on queer identities more explicit, my project privileges meta-communication about queer identities, and specifically highlights particular intersections of queer identities with other socio-cultural identities and also with issues related to the body and politics.

Queer Identities in Day-to-Day Life

My own experience as a queer man who has long struggled to make some sense

of my identities informs the first research question, which asks: How do queer men

experience their identities in their everyday lives? To help elicit narratives regarding this

question, I prompted my participants to "Tell me a little bit about your identities," and

asked, "What does queerness mean to you?" and "What does maleness mean to you?"

These open-ended questions gave way to individual stories that were elaborated on over

the course of two meetings. I present these stories below by first introducing my

participants and sharing their thoughts on their identities, which leads into discussions of

how they make meaningful their queer identities and why they identify as queer and not

gay. Some narratives take a similar form, tracing important moments or turning points in

their identities, so I title this section "Journey to Queer." I then discuss the ways in which

my participants try to reconcile their queerness and maleness, and finally, I highlight how

participants experience their identities in intersectional ways, focusing on how queerness

intersects with other socio-cultural identities. These narratives set up forthcoming

discussions of queer bodies and queer politics.

Introductions: Narrating Identities

Each of the five narrators conveys a diversity of identities and experiences as they

describe themselves. Stanley[33] expresses his identities in the following way:

> I come from a working class background,
> though I'm pretty white collar now.
> But I guess I'd be pink collar because of my profession.
> I identify as transgendered[34],

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[33] Although my default position was to assign my participants pseudonyms, two participants preferred I use their real names. However, I do not identify in the text which names are pseudonyms and which are not.

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which definitely plays into my queer maleness.
I'm white,
so I try to deal with issues of white privilege.
It's funny because I'm like an *ethnic* white person…
so sometimes people assume I'm a person of color.
My parents are Italian immigrants,
they have dark olive skin.
I have olive skin.
It's not that dark,
but sometimes people will assume I'm Latino.
…I'm fat.
I've done work with fat acceptance for most of my adult life.

I tend to consider myself temporarily able-bodied,
because it feels somewhat fleeting.

Stanley concisely lists his identities but does not simplify them. Instead, he relationally

and intersectionally discusses his identities, finding his class background, occupation,

gender identity, ethnicity and family heritage, body type, and ability salient. Instead of

viewing his identities as an additive list, Stanley acknowledges white privilege, the

complexity and problematics of ethnicity, and the fleeting able-bodied privilege he

possesses, which demonstrates that he critically evaluates his identities rather than simply

acknowledging them in a list. Stanley was the first participant with whom I met, and I

was impressed with his demonstration of self-reflexivity and anxious to see if my other

participants demonstrated a similar critical consciousness in regards to their identities.

As I continued to meet with each participant, they approached my opening prompt

with a level of sophistication and reflexivity, which I theorize is representative of a

"queer consciousness" that develops as a result of experiencing incongruency with

identities and/or socio-cultural norms, and then being reflexive about the causes and

consequences of identity incongruency. Throughout the narratives, participants recount

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[34] Stanley refers to himself as "transgendered" instead of "transgender," which is more often used. While I use "transgender" in my own writing, I use his own words when describing him.

experiencing incongruency when they were considered heterosexual *and* when they later avowed sexual orientation identity labels like gay or lesbian. They also experienced incongruency within their identifications as male or female and in terms of how they viewed their body and personal politics in relation to mainstream society. These experiences of incongruency became exigent moments that predicated participants' moves away from mainstream identity categories and toward more queer identities. The narratives of incongruency were especially resonant with me, as they mirrored my own motivations for identifying as queer. The longing I mentioned in Chapter One, to be around and communicate with other queer men, was fulfilled through these conversations, as I realized my experiences of identity incongruence—experiences that led me to this dissertation project—could be communicated and affirmed through my research. The mutual process of storytelling within this research independently and organically validated the importance and power of personal narrative to people who are and feel marginalized (Corey, "Personal"; Corey, "On Possibility"; Langellier, "Personal Narrative, Performance") and also demonstrated the dialogic and reciprocal nature of intersubjective research. My participants retrospectively narrate their identities in intersectional and reflexive ways as they recount their past through the lens of queer consciousness.

While many identities attempt to dissuade people from pushing boundaries or elide contradictions inherent within those identities, espousing a queer identity allows for ambiguity and messiness. The queerness and messiness of intersecting identities is exemplified in Anzaldúa's discussion of the "new mestiza" consciousness, which includes reflections on spirituality, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, and

(im)migration. Acknowledging the ways in which embodied queerness fractures

identities, Anzaldúa highlights the agency that may exist in the borderlands between

identities. Although Anzaldúa's new mestiza consciousness focuses on the salience of her

Chicana identity, more generally her concept illustrates the explicit anti-essentialist

ontology and self-reflexivity all my participants' queer consciousness demonstrates,

which is a throughline that will continue to develop in the analysis.

Erik's description of his identities draws on his experiences growing up in a city

with a reputation for being conservative, if not fundamentalist, and homogenous:

> I have *lots* of identities.
> Let me see,
> queer is one of them,
> being male is one of them,
> being a man of color…
> I'm a little off-white.
> I just say I'm multiracial rather than trying to identify as anything else.
> …Being an effeminate male,
> not-necessarily-a-masculine-male, could be one of my identities.
> My gender identity has actually *just* started changing within the last month.
> I'm moving toward more identifying as genderqueer,
> not as trans,
> because I don't believe I'm trans,
> but as genderqueer because I don't fit gender male stereotypes.
>
> Coming from
> I guess
> a white background in the city I lived in,
> and having a low socioeconomic status would be another identity.
>
> I would consider myself able-bodied.
> That's something I always forget to think about,
> But, in a sense, I also have a personality disorder.
> I have bipolar 2,
> which I have to work with,
> and all through high school I was on drugs for that.
>
> And so,
> I think,

yeah,
my identity is ever growing,
and I think the older I get and the more I learn,
the more my identity will change to define me better than what it has in the past.

Erik's self-description as an effeminate multi-racial male who is diagnosed with bipolar 2 already positions him within a liminal space incongruent to societal norms. His identification as genderqueer further distances him from gender norms. While genderqueer, like queer, resists definition, it is an inclusive identity marker for those who may or may not explicitly identify as transgender. For example, a genderqueer person may identify as the gender they were assigned at birth, but perform gender more fluidly by presenting as androgynous or by actively contesting gender role stereotypes. In his case, Erik queers gender by avowing rather than abjecting his effeminacies. I expand more on the complex relationships among masculinity, femininity, homophobia, and patriarchy in the upcoming section on queerness and maleness.

Kelly, like Stanley, offers a concise list of identities but spends more time reflecting on ability than other participants. Interestingly, no participant offered an identification in terms of ability without me prompting them to discuss it, which may indicate that ability is not as salient as other identities. However, each participant was ready to discuss ability on multiple levels, which demonstrates existing consciousness of ability as an identity marker and the privileges and disadvantages that come with being mentally and physically able-bodied or not.

Being queer is *definitely* one of the forefront identities for me,
both in the way I relate to friends and my social networks,
and also in terms of the work that I do professionally,
volunteer-wise,
and things like that.
I also identify as transgender,

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which is a big one for me.
I identify as white,
as male,
and as sort of an urban person.
And then there's other more *political* identities
of being a feminist,
and having what *I* consider to be radical politics.

I've definitely questioned my able-bodiedness a lot,
or I've thought about it a lot.
I think, in general,
I definitely have able-bodied privilege.
Recently I developed a repetitive stress injury,
that I *think* was related to testosterone,
that actually made me *rethink* a lot of the ways that I access my body.
And I've also thought about a lot of mental health stuff,
and trying to figure out from time to time what's going on for me?
Do I *need* any support?
Do I *not* need support?
…When am I tricking myself into thinking everything is okay?

Kelly lists personal, social, cultural, and political identities that are salient to him before

questioning his able-bodiedness and the stability of such an identification. Kelly's

repetitive stress injury affected him physically and emotionally by exposing how we

often take for granted the ways in which our body operates. Kelly's unsureness about his

mental health beckons more discussion about the continuing stigma of utilizing mental

health services and the unique circumstances of people from marginalized groups for

which health care providers may or may not be prepared. All my participants question

their mental stability or identify as having or having struggled with mental issues such as

depression, bi-polar disorder, social anxiety, or an eating disorder. Throughout my life, I

have dealt with similar issues and have sought therapeutic, psychological, and psychiatric

treatment. While I am not trying to draw a causal link between struggles with mental

issues and queerness, such a link is in keeping with statistics that describe the prevalence

of mental issues in GLBT communities. Recent research has shown that gays, lesbians, and bisexual men and women are more likely to experience major depression, panic disorder, and generalized anxiety disorder (Meyer), and it is not unreasonable to assume that the prevalence of these issues among GLBT people is related to their marginalization within heteronormative society.

Moises' discussion of identities focuses mainly on gender performance and how his identities are informed by his familial cultural connections to Azteca traditions and spirituality. In our meetings, Moises talked at length about the relationships among his Chicano, gender, and queer identities, which are previewed here, and will continue to develop in later narratives:

> My name is Moises,
> and I identify as a Chicano.
> I also identify as queer.
> My gender goes back and forth.
> I'm biologically male,
> so I have to own that part,
> definitely.
> I often portray or express masculinity in the way I dress,
> but not always.
> But, I guess in general my gender is fluctuating.
> It's pretty fluid.
> Genderqueer is usually what I go with.
> I also usually associate myself as coming from the lower to working class.
> I also identify as a poet and a dancer
> and someone who has a degree of spirituality that's rooted in Azteca culture.
>
> I do identify as able-bodied.

Moises begins this narrative by avowing his Chicano ethnic identity and later mentions his Azteca cultural heritage, and he elaborates further on these identities in upcoming narratives. Like Erik, Moises explicitly states he performs masculinity in alternative ways that are not always normative or hegemonic. Moises also says he has to "own" his

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maleness which implies his male identity is problematic in some way and gestures toward discussions of the oftentimes contentious relationship between queerness and maleness. The complexity of gender will be further demonstrated in the narratives of the four participants who identify as transgender or genderqueer, and although Alex does not identify as either, his narratives also relay feelings of incongruency within his gender identity and expression, and all the narratives illustrate the ways in which queer identities allow for fluidity in performances of sexuality and gender, among others.

  Alex's normative family background plays an important role in his narrative and informs his practice of self-reflexively questioning the privileges that come with his identities. Alex also discusses his mental and physical ability, noting his struggle with anxiety and mood disorders. Although physically healthy, Alex later narrates his long time struggle with body image issues:

> I have a very Caucasian family,
> you know blue-blood-kind-of-thing.
> But we're *very* American,
> let's put it that way.
> We've been here a very long time.
> And we're a standard American family I suppose.
> You know,
> parents divorced young,
> white-upper-middle-class kind of deal.
> I'm fully aware that I benefit from white male privilege.
> I mean…
> I think in some cases, I can be their poster boy.
> But-at-the-same-time,
> I do face adversity in the same breath because of my non-normative aspects,
> like being untraditionally masculine and queer.
> …But I *benefit* from that as well.
>
> As far as ability goes,
> I've been in therapy most of my life,
> like dealing with depression.
> If you want to get really technical,

it's apparently a mild bipolar with generalized social anxiety,
although it has lessened over the years actually.
I was very *angst-y* in my teenage years.
I think my social anxiety is something that is really difficult for me to deal with
and it's completely unpredictable.

Alex identifies the privileges and disadvantages that come with his identities by acknowledging the privilege of his comfortable upbringing in terms of class and race and the marginalization he has felt as a result of his gender expression, queerness, and challenges with mood and anxiety.

These introductions not only allow us to examine how these particular queer men describe themselves and their identities, they also begin to illustrate how the participants think of their identities in intersectional and reflexive ways and introduce important themes of identity incongruence, maleness, body image, and politics that run through the remainder of the chapter. While the participants all avow similar identities of queer and male, there is variation in regards to other important identities. Of the five participants, two identify as transgender and two identify as genderqueer. Although they question and problematize masculinity by performing gender in fluid and/or non-normative ways, all identify as male. In terms of race and ethnicity, three identify as white, one identifies as multi-racial, and one identifies as Chicano. In terms of class, three identify as coming from working to lower class, one identifies as middle class, and one identifies as upper middle class. When describing ability, none of the participants identify themselves as having a physical disability, although all the participants discuss being diagnosed with and/or questioning mental health issues. The range of education and age among the participants is not as diverse as other demographics, as all have at least some college

education and range in age from 20 to 33. Now, I turn from general introductions to narratives that more specifically examine queerness in everyday life.

What does queerness mean to you?

To gain insight into the day-to-day experiences of queerness, I asked: "What does queerness mean to you?" As I outlined in Chapter Two, *queer* is a word that resists definition, as it represents a state of flux and fluidity. In order to preserve the variability and versatility of queer, I consciously avoid presenting the narrative responses to this question as totalizing definitions of queer identity. Rather, as Gamson ("Sexualities") suggests, I view identities as narratives instead of essential categories. I also conceptualize identities using a critical realist framework discussed in Chapter Two, which privileges the lived experience of my participants while examining the contexts that constitute their identities. Within my question, I also made a conscious syntactical choice to use *queerness* instead of *queer*—*queer* being an adjective to describe oneself or something, and *queerness* being an abstract noun to describe a state or condition. I prefer the latter because the words *state* and *condition* connote change and mutability. The word *queerness* also allows participants to think beyond the confines of themselves as individual subjects and, instead, to think more abstractly about their identities, their politics, and their worldviews as performances of queerness rather than inherently and essentially queer.

Alex offers a most succinct view of queerness, distinct from an umbrella term for GLBT people:

My *first* inclination,
when I started thinking about queerness,
when I was younger,

was that,
"Oh, queer is just like the blanket term for everything."
But later,
through really recognizing it and thinking about it,
while queer is *used* that way and can *function* that way,
it *doesn't* necessarily.
It *is* separate and different.
It has a *different* element to it as well.
I've *never* felt like I fit in any particular group or situation.

Alex's view of queerness is in keeping with Gamson's ("Sexualities") preferred definition of queer as an identity that deviates from norms, as opposed to shorthand for GLBT people or communities. Alex, and other participants' narratives demonstrate that they came organically to a similar understanding of *queer* through their own experiences. In the last line of this narrative, Alex implies that his current understanding of queer as an identity was realized after numerous frustrating experiences of not fitting in. Although I theorize that experiences of incongruency are catalysts for the development of queer consciousness, the material, emotional, and physical effects of feeling different, isolated, or excluded should not be ignored.

Participants share, in later narratives, how their experience of queerness led to feelings of isolation from mainstream heterosexual and gay communities. I specifically use the plural of *community* because there is no monolithic "heterosexual community" or "gay community." When used in the singular, community discursively implies an ideologically and perhaps culturally homogenous group of people that only exists in myth. However, social discourses and dominant ideologies exert hegemonic power by attempting to interpellate people into identification with an essentialized notion of community. For example, there is a mythical "gay community" with which gay people are supposed to "come out of the closet" and instantly identify with. As some participants

will narrate later, after being rejected by the "heterosexual community," they found out

that the "gay community" they actively tried to fit in with and expected to accept them

with open arms did not exist. I provide this example to illustrate how the word *community*

may intentionally or unintentionally create discursive closure and essentialize people who

are or are perceived to be a part of that community. So, even though my participants and I

have had negative experiences with people who identify as heterosexual and people who

identify as gay, I do not want to essentialize everyone who avows one of those labels

down to a close-minded oppressor. However, the narratives illustrate that my

participants' experiences of incongruency were lessened, but not fully erased, when they

found or created their own queer communities. Moises narrates some of his experiences

of incongruency and focuses on how he negotiates some of the difficulties of queerness

by using creativity as a strategy:

> To a degree,
> I feel that creativity *is* connected to queerness.
> I have had to be,
> and continue to have to be,
> *creative* in deciding who I am or in how I identify.
> I feel like that process is constantly changing,
> and there's a degree of creativity needed.
> I feel like this identity process…
> of finally deciding I'm queer, *was* a creative process.
> It's really up to an individual to define what queer means.
> I mean that's where it essentially becomes very difficult.
> Like, I've had *very* intense conversations with my friends who are like
> "I want to identify as queer but what does it mean? Give me a definition!"
> And I'm like,
> "I can't really do that for you, you kind of have to develop it on your own."

Moises communicates the personal nature of queerness by explaining that one has to

come to their own understanding of what queer means to them and that one person's

experience or understanding of queerness cannot be transferred to another through a

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definition, which demonstrates the ways in which queerness in lived experience mirrors theoretical conceptualizations of queer as fluid. Moises' difficulty explaining queerness to other people is not viewed as a hindrance; rather, Moises finds satisfaction in the ambiguity of queerness, which he sees as a place for creativity and play.

Kelly discusses difficulties he experienced in coming out as queer, and addresses multiple layers of queerness in terms of identity, politics, and inclusivity. Kelly also distinguishes queerness from sexual orientation by narrating the ways in which he found sexual orientation labels confining, inaccurate, and exclusive in relation to the inclusivity of queer:

> Queer, for me, has a lot of layers.
> One is more of what people think of it meaning,
> as having a different sexual orientation,
> or about romantic interests and things like that.
> And what I found is,
> I've never really felt comfortable with *any* of the LGB labels…
> that they never seemed to quite fit.
> And there *were* times when I could have potentially fit into all of them…
> which is interesting to have been able to dabble.
> But, there's always the perception that people are trying to…
> *pin down* my sexuality.
> So, when I first came out,
> I was struggling and said "gay" to my dad,
> because I knew he would understand "gay."
> If I said "queer" there would be this whole other thing,
> that I didn't even want to get into,
> because I was *so* freaked out by just saying "gay."
> So, when I first came out,
> everyone thought I was a *lesbian* or a *dyke*…
> And maybe dyke would have fit a little bit more than lesbian,
> but I never identified that way.
> And it was hard,
> too…
> trying to figure out,
> "Okay, now I'm out, so being queer means I date women,
> only I am *really* attracted to boys.
> And so what does that *mean* for my identity?

Am I queer or not? Am I bisexual?"
So, it took me a while to actually use the word "queer" for myself.
I think at the same time,
it's the only thing that *fit* really,
because no matter who I was interested in romantically, sexually, physically,
whatever, it didn't bump heads with the queer identity.

And then,
in terms of more like social and political circles,
there's definitely this queer identity that for me,
kind of overlaps with sexual orientation,
but there can be this *clear* distinction.
So, I have people who identify as *heterosexual* in my queer community,
because they understand some of the dynamics at play.
For example,
when I talked to one straight friend about transitioning,
and about how *now* I'm going to be perceived as a white male,
that's all I had to say for her to be able to be like,
"Wow that's a big deal,"
as opposed to having to *sit down* and *explain*,
"Well, here's how this works, and here's how people are going to treat me."
She just *got* it.
So I guess the shorter version is that queerness for me…
is a way that I can live *my* life,
honestly and with integrity,
without feeling boxed in.

Kelly's choice to identify as queer served as a strategy to avoid the confinement and

limitations that come with sexual orientation labels such as lesbian and gay. Kelly's

experiences as a transgender man also highlight the ways in which gender identity and

sexual orientation are often problematically conflated. For example, many people often

assume feminine men are gay and masculine women are lesbian, which exposes

underlying conceptual links among gender identity, gender expression, and sexual

orientation that are facile and overlook the complexity and variation that exists within

each of those identity markers. In Kelly's case, he was read as a masculine female before

his transition and, as he says in an upcoming narrative, is now read as a "faggy" man

after his transition to male, which illuminates the arbitrary ways in which gender is read. Kelly has avowed various sexual orientation labels that may or may not have "matched up" with how his gender was perceived by others. Queer as an identity label allows room for Kelly's gender identity and sexual orientation to be fluid. In short, Kelly's avowal of a queer identity allowed him to negotiate the process of transitioning from female-identified to male-identified and to express sexual and romantic interests in females and males along the way without being encumbered by the identity politics of gay or lesbian. Transgender studies and gender theorists have been at the forefront of exploring how issues of gender and sexuality intersect but are not conflated, and Wilchins' primer on gender theory and queer theory skillfully makes this connection. Furthermore, the connections between gender and sexual orientation that Kelly complicates in his narrative have been explored by transgender authors have also written personal accounts of their experiences of gender in ways that implicitly connect queerness and gender (Serano; Scholinski).

Kelly also explains that heterosexual people can be queer or experience queerness, and that he has heterosexual-identified friends whom he considers a part of his queer community. Erik echoes Kelly's sentiments by further describing the inclusive quality of queerness:

> I feel like my view of the world is a little *skewed* because of being queer.
> I feel like I always live in two separate worlds.
> Like here at school,
> I live mostly in the straight world,
> and then I *also* live in a smaller gay world.
> And-in-the-straight-world, I'm a slut,
> And in the gay world, I don't sleep with *enough* people to get along.
> So, I'm queer, and I don't fit in either.

> I feel like queer is a label of acceptance.
> Like, when you identify as queer,
> and there are other people who identify as queer,
> you're automatically safe in that zone, because other people *understand*.
> I can express myself a lot more in queer situations because,
> at-least-with-my-experience with queer people,
> they're a lot more accepting of my identity.
> I don't have to defend being a person of color or my queer gender identity.
> They're just like, "Okay it's cool."
> And I think *anyone* can be queer.
> Like you don't have to necessarily be straight or gay or bisexual or lesbian…
> or *anything* to be queer.
> I think that straight people can be queer
> as long as they're willing to push their envelope.

Erik, like Kelly, discusses queer identity as a way to break out of limiting sexual categories, and he continues to expand on the theme of not fitting in and later finding safety and security within his queer community. Erik narrates how the inclusivity of queer leads facilitates more openness and less judgment, which creates for him spaces of possibility in which he may play with gender and sexuality without fear of reproach. Erik's statement that straight people can be queer if "they're willing to push their envelopes" demonstrates an important part of developing a queer consciousness. While my participants and I came to develop queer consciousness through our involuntary experiences of incongruency and the consciousness-raising that resulted from being reflexive about these experiences, other people can develop queer consciousness by voluntarily putting themselves in liminal spaces and by challenging themselves and people around them. In this sense, queer as an identity label can be used and queer consciousness can be developed across identities. Each participant came to identify as queer through a series of personal turning points. However, after collecting and analyzing

the personal narratives, there are surprising similarities between my participants' and my own identity trajectories.

Journeys to Queer

From my experience and from the research I have done, the decision to identify as queer comes after a long, personal, emotional, and complicated journey through other identity labels. Like me, my participants trace their identities on a trajectory that starts with identifying as heterosexual, moves to identifying somewhere on the GLBT spectrum, and then moves to identifying as queer. In my case, I began to identify as heterosexual in early adolescence, mostly as a reaction to my middle school peers who were questioning my sexuality. Then, I "came out" to my best friend as bisexual when I was 14. Even though I knew I was more attracted to males than females, I thought calling myself bisexual might soften the blow for her and lessen any negative reaction she may have. My short stint as a bisexual came to an end when I was 15, and after a couple instances of sexual experimentation and later developing a small group of gay friends in my high school, I decidedly "came out" again, as gay. For the next ten years or so, I rarely thought critically about my gay identity. Although I was at times frustrated by the cults of beauty and masculinity I regularly encountered in gay male culture, I more often than not gave into social pressures and tried to conform and comport myself into those stereotypes. Not for lack of trying, I generally failed in all my attempts. It was not until I was 25, and engaged with queer theory that I made a conscious shift from gay-identified to queer-identified. My participants all recount similar stories, but neither them nor I speak of our queer identification as a final point, as we all acknowledge the ongoing changes and challenges within a queer identification.

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Stanley's journey entails coming out as a bisexual-identified female and then moves toward his current identification as a queer transgendered male. He also discusses the comfort he finds within the label *queer* and the limitations that sexual orientation labels carry with them:

When I was first coming out,
I came out as bisexual,
and I really didn't feel that was a good term.
And so I became initially interested in the term "queer,"
because it offered an *alternative*,
and, also at that time,
I was like a self-righteous-vegetarian-anarchist,
so queer *seemed…*
you know,
to better embody my resistance to heteronormativity
and,
you know…
homonormativity.

I came out as bisexual when I was 21,
which was late,
but-I'm-good-at-denial.
I was *not* identified as transgendered then.
I didn't really come out as transgendered to anyone until a few years after that.
And also,
when I came out,
I was really interested in alternative relationship models,
like non-monogamous relationships and whatnot,
which is definitely not normative.

Coming out as queer was different, because it was more *controversial* language.
A lot of people I knew,
who identified as gay or lesbian,
not necessarily bisexual,
I don't know that many bisexuals,
really had visceral negative reactions to the word "queer."
They say things like,
"Oh I can't stand to hear that word,
it makes me think of when I was a kid and they called us queer."
And it's *still* a painful word,
which I can understand.
I mean, I don't like to hurt other people.

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I don't like to make other people feel uncomfortable.
But-at-the-same-time,
the word "queer" really resonates with *me*
in a way that other words to describe my sexual orientation don't.
…So, I may try to explain queer to them by talking about reclaiming words,
that had been used against a group of people, as positives.
Most people I told understood it *intellectually*
but just *emotionally*,
the word…
couldn't work for them.

I didn't really like the idea of identifying as gay,
because it felt very clinical…
and I mean…
it's-sort-of-similar to the complaints people have with the word "homosexual."
It narrows everything down to who you have sex with
or wish to have sex with.
And so that made me really uncomfortable,
because for me, it was as much of an *identity*
as who I was going to roll around in bed with.
And then a couple of years after I initially came out,
maybe two or three years,
I started hearing about people who were gender variant,
or who identified as genders other than male or female.
And so *bisexual*,
with the prefix "bi,"
became even less accurate,
because that implies that you're only interested in *two* genders,
and I wasn't.
So it seemed queer was the way to go.
I liked how queer had this *amorphous* quality to it.
And then later,
in college or in grad school,
I read a little bit about queer theory,
and this idea of queer being something that *unsettles* other identities,
and I thought that was cool.

Stanley's frustrations with the sexual limitations of gay, lesbian, and bisexual echo those

shared earlier by Erik and Kelly. Stanley's description of the labels "gay" and

"homosexual" as "clinical" show how those labels are often reduced to, as Stanley puts it,

"who [one is] going to roll around in bed with," diminishing the complexity of a person

down to what stimulates their sex organs. He also specifically points out limitations of

"bi" in that it implies one is only interested in two genders. Since most of my participants

identify as genderqueer or transgender, it is not surprising that they critique the ways in

which sexual orientation labels maintain and reinforce the gender binary. As Stanley

points out at the end of this narrative, queer as an identity extends beyond sexual

orientation and "unsettles" other identities. An important theme also begins to emerge

here in terms of identity development. All the participants note going to college as a key

moment in exploring their queer identity. Furthermore, some participants recount a

similar experience to mine in that exposure to queer theory was an important exigent

moment that led us to identify as queer. While these narratives highlight the important

intersection of queer theory and queer identity, my participants and I experienced our

identities in queer ways before we were exposed to queer theory. Like most theories

developed by marginalized groups, indigenous theorizing often emerges as a way to

make sense of one's experiences and critique the exclusion of their experiences and

identities from academic inquiry. In our cases, queer ways of being pre-dated queer

theory; however, queer theory provided us a lens through which to explore, understand,

and communicate our experiences. Feminist theorist Flax captures this connection in the

following:

> The most important characteristic of theory is that it is a systematic, analytic
> approach to everyday experience. This everybody does unconsciously. To
> theorize, then, is to bring this unconscious process to the conscious level so it can
> be developed and refined. All of us operate on theories, though most of them are
> implicit. We screen out certain things…we make choices and we don't always
> understand why. Theory, in other words, makes those choices conscious, and
> enables us to use them more efficiently. (3)

Academic theory and the daily experiences of oppressed people are not mutually

exclusive, which is why I value the cerebral quality of queerness and am not surprised to

see my participants mark their college education as a turning point in their queer

identities, which Erik conveys in this narrative:

> I was about 15 when I starting coming out.
> I came out as bi.
> Of course,
> before then,
> I-just-thought-I-was-straight since I really didn't know what gay was,
> …except for that it was bad.
> So I never really thought I was gay.
> I always thought I was a little bit *different* though.
> I *really* didn't date anyone.
> Well, I dated *one* girl.
> She was the first girl I had an actual relationship with,
> other than a middle school relationship.
> …It was just an *awkward* period.
>
> I'd never had any experiences with a guy quite yet,
> except for I liked this one guy who was a senior.
> I kissed him in the back of a car,
> and that *totally* changed my perceptions of what my identity was,
> and then I was questioning my bi-ness.
> I realized,
> "I'm not bi, I don't like girls nearly as much as I like guys,"
> and I just accepted my gay identity.
>
> I was *beat up* in sixth grade for being gay,
> and I didn't even *identify* as gay then.
> So it's kind of like,
> I already felt the effect before I realized I was gay.
>
> I didn't know what queer was until I got to college.
> Then, I no longer identified as gay because,
> I'm not just gay,
> and I'm like "I don't just fit as a gay."
> "I'm just queer."
> "Just different."
> Once you identify as gay you cut off a lot of people,
> like you *only* date men,
> you could *never* date a girl again,

you can *never* date a trans person, necessarily,
because-it-just-doesn't-work.
But, when you're queer,
you can date men,
women,
whatever, and you're not necessarily bi,
but you're-just-*queer*,
and you're not constricted in your language.

And, I think also in that sense, it's okay to be necessarily…biologically…
more feminine or more masculine,
and to like *push* gender boundaries.
While in the gay community,
you can't push those same issues.
Like in a queer group, it's okay for me to say,
"I am an effeminate male."
"I have more estrogen in my body and that's just who I am."
I've met a lot of gay people who are very sexist,
and I've met a lot of queer people,
and they're not nearly as sexist.
So I just kind of felt like being queer is more accepting,
and being queer seemed like the next step for me.

Erik's identity trajectory during his adolescence and high school years is surprisingly

similar to my own. His experience of physical violence in sixth grade demonstrates the

forceful identity policing to which young men who are perceived as sexual non-

conformists are subjected. Erik, like me, did not identify as bi or gay at this time but as he

says, "felt the effect" of being gay before he even identified as gay. During the first or

second week of sixth grade, a friend, or so I thought, called me a "faggot" for the first

time as he passed me in the hall during class change. Honestly, I did not know what

"faggot" meant, so I was unsure of how to react. When I got home and looked it up,

things became much clearer, and I began to wonder if this was actually an accurate

descriptor for the feelings I had been having. This began a tumultuous few years of

simultaneously internalizing and finding identification with the names I was being called,

and rejecting those external labels and the internal feelings to which they corresponded.

Erik again mentions the comfort he feels regarding his gender identity within his

queer-identified community, which he juxtaposes with his experiences of sexism within

the gay communities to which he was exposed. The incongruency Erik felt between his

gender performance as an effeminate male and the sexism within some aspects of gay

male culture influenced his choice to explicitly identify as queer instead of gay. Erik

clearly points out the frustration he felt as a feminine gay man trying to find a place

within gay male culture in this narrative:

> I think femininity is looked at in a *skewed* way in the gay community,
> because if you're *feminine*,
> you're looked down upon.
> Like online,
> gay men write in their profiles:
> "I'm a gay man and I'm interested in men not women.
> So, no guys who act like women."
> I think people are afraid to accept *any* view of femininity,
> within their own identity,
> or within anyone they're dating.
> A lot of gay men want big burly men,
> and so I'm not what they're looking for.

Erik's experiences point to another component of queer consciousness, which is

acknowledging and contesting aspects of heteronormative society and also

homonormativity, or collusion with heteronormative othering that exists within gay

communities. In short, men, regardless of their sexual orientation, may practice sexism

and misogyny, and sexism is directed toward women as well as men who display

characteristics perceived to be feminine. The cult of masculinity that exists within some

of gay male culture inevitably results in the denigration of femininity. While many gay

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men buy into misogyny or effemimania, many other gay men do not, and some, like Erik, distance themselves from gay male culture by identifying as queer. Ironically, gay men who are oppressed by heterosexism, but then intentionally or unintentionally reify sexism through their denigration of the feminine, are reproducing the same system that oppresses them. hooks writes: "heterosexism is definitely the child of sexism. It is the child of gender oppression" (*Talking Back* 173). She states that sexism, heterosexism, and homophobia are all ancillary systems of patriarchy, and Erik's experiences expose intersections among these systems of oppression that are prevalent in other participants' narratives.

Alex's narrative recounts his intellectual and aesthetic exposure to queer theory in college, and how freeing the idea of queerness was in terms of viewing the world and other people:

> An art history teacher in my undergrad really influenced my queer identity.
> This was my senior year of undergrad,
> and I identified as a gay male.
> She was this older lady,
> and she was super androgynous,
> and she used to be a construction worker down in southern California.
> She's the first one who sort of
> *introduced* me to the idea of queerness really.
> I noticed how freeing queer was and it excited me to see that.
>
> I feel like queer communities are more open,
> …honestly, I really do.
> I feel like they're less judgmental in a lot of ways.
> I feel like they're open to more ideas.
> Their ideas on *gender* are not set in stone.
> Their idea of *sex* is a lot more fluid,
> the way they look at the world is very open.
> I mean gay men are not feminists inherently, and that's a problem for me.
> There's tons of misogyny within the gay male community,
> and I cannot tolerate that.
> It drives me insane.

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> I mean misogyny is the root of homophobia in my mind.
> And I'm *definitely* a feminist,
> and I don't think I've met a queer person,
> at least who actually identifies as queer, who's *not* a feminist.
> That's extremely important to me.
> So I guess it really has to do with,
> aligning myself with ideologies that are similar to my own.
> Here's what I say:
> *Gay* is who you have *sex* with and *queer* is how you *think*.

Alex's exposure to queer theory was an exigent moment in the development of this social and political consciousness, and like Erik, Alex derides the sexism he has personally experienced within gay male culture. Alex specifically notes that his queer consciousness leads him to ally himself with people and groups that have similar ideologies of inclusivity, which simultaneously led him to dissociate from other gay men.

Alex's closing line, "Gay is who you have sex with and queer is how you think," is brief, powerful, and indicative of the intellectual quality of queerness and its ties to academic inquiry vis-à-vis the influence of queer theory. By tracing "journeys to queer" and communicating with queer men about their identities, I explore how intellectual and theoretical aspects of queer theory are performed in lived experience. Unfortunately, the cerebral is often juxtaposed with the corporeal reifying the mind/body split, which has been critiqued by postmodern theories and theorists (Lorraine). As outlined in Chapter Two, queer theory's unbalanced focus on the discursive over the material enhances the cerebral aspects of queer theory, while materiality and corporeality have been largely overlooked. Through the performance paradigm, I bring the body into my research on queerness, but it is important not to overlook the ways in which queer theory, at the intellectual level, has enabled my participants and I to make sense of our identities and experiences. By acknowledging the importance of discourse and materiality, or the

cerebral and corporeal, I can highlight how personal engagement with queer theory creates a discursive space that may allow queer people to explore their identities, which may lead them to view their bodies as valid and meaningful and further contribute to the development of queer consciousness. In short, queer ways of thinking can lead to queer ways of being.

Trying to Reconcile Queerness and Maleness

Intellectually, I am intrigued by the confluence of queer theory, gender theory, and trans theory that inform discussions of sexuality and gender, but personally, I feel conflicted about how my identifications as male and queer can co-exist. Erik and Moises have already narrated their experiences of gender as an effeminate male and identifying as genderqueer, and Erik and Alex have struggled against the sexism they experiences in gay male culture, which exposes fundamental intersections among feminism, misogyny, and homophobia.

Connell extends hooks' claims regarding the relationship between sexual orientation and patriarchal culture. He states sexual attraction among gay men is not just about finding a body with a penis, but it is also the "choice of embodied-masculinity. The cultural meanings of masculinity are, generally, part of the package. Most gays are in this sense 'very straight'" (156). Connell sees the longing for masculinity, either that mirrors or supplements one's own, as a reaction to heterosexist/patriarchal culture—a reaction that reifies sexism by valorizing masculinity and denigrating femininity. Wilchins demonstrates this connection through an activity she conducts while leading workshops on gender issues with gay men. She observes that the men in her workshop are comfortable when discussing *her* gender issues, but not their own. When she asks how

many in the room are gay, they all raise their hands. When she asks how many of them

are bottoms, all their hands quickly go down and they laugh uncomfortably. She states:

"It usually turns out that the reason it's so humiliating is that playing catcher is seen as

feminine—the woman's role. It also usually turns out that even the buffest guys were

once taunted in school or had to *butch it up* at work" (18). So, the complex connection

between gender and sexuality continues to emerge, and I am led to ask myself, "How

can/does queer consciousness contest sexism?" An important part of my queer

consciousness is acknowledging my male privilege; however, this process becomes

problematic as I try to reconcile my feminist politics, my view of gender as fluid, and the

ways in which my own gender performances are often intentionally masculine, not fluid,

and normative. This complicated question is addressed throughout the narratives

regarding queerness and maleness.

Two participants identify as transgender males and their narratives regarding

maleness are particularly poignant. Stanley says:

> My queer identity has been around a lot longer than my male identity,
> so I'm trying to integrate the two…
> but it can be *difficult*.
> As-far-as-maleness-goes,
> I don't think I'm ever going to be one of those people
> who *passes* 100 percent as *male*,
> even though I *hate* the word "passes."
> I guess I should say,
> I don't think I'll ever be "unclockable."
> So, in a certain sense,
> I'm always going to be somewhat different from non-trans men,
> especially since I'll always have this worry that,
> what if I take my underwear off…
> *then* what happens?
> So that's one way in which I feel my male identity is queer.

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I *had* tried to struggle against assimilation
in assuming an atypically masculine gendered identity.
But, at the same time,
I'm really aware that if I do "these things" or look "this way,"
or whatever,
it's going to be much less likely that people perceive me as a man.
So it's a constant struggle.
When I identified as female,
I could define femininity.
But now…
I'm just,
you know…
I just throw up my hands.
I can't tell anymore.

You *can* feel uncomfortable with the gender binary
while making a choice to live in it.

Stanley's close to this narrative philosophically points to the ontological angst that may

come with queer identities. Importantly, his conclusion shows a sophisticated level of

self-reflexivity that is in keeping with the conceptualization of queerness as an unstable

identity. For example, Stanley acknowledges his queer sensibilities are imperfect and he

implicates himself in the perpetuation of dominant ideologies that present narrow options

for how masculinity "should" be performed even as he actively critiques and contests

those ideologies. Fractured as a queer identity may be, analyzing stories of queerness

shows the progression of and development of a queer consciousness including its benefits

and its inconsistencies. For example, while he currently struggles to fight assimilation in

terms of gender, Stanley relays a specific memory that juxtaposes his current level of

consciousness and desire to thwart gender norms with an experience of adolescent peer

pressure:

In like 6th and 7th grade,
I was called a bitch for *whatever* reason.
I was difficult,

and *weird*,
and female,
so *I* was called a bitch.

I was really reluctant to shave,
like to shave my legs and to shave my underarms.
Even though I *knew* you had to,
and I wanted people leave me alone,
I still didn't really like it.
And so,
I was in the 8th grade girls' locker room,
and I hadn't shaved under my arms for a while,
I guess because I wasn't interested,
or maybe I had irritated skin or something.
And this girl,
Becky,
in my class, noticed and she called me a lesbian.
And I was just like…
I was shocked.
And then I was really confused,
because I didn't know what being a *lesbian*
had to do with *not shaving* under your arms.
And so then,
I made sure I shaved very dutifully,
and would sort of,
go-out-of-my-way to stretch my arm up to make sure that *she* saw:
"Look, I shaved! Not a lesbian."

While gender policing of Erik and Moises' performances of masculinity is salient in their narratives, Stanley's narrative demonstrates how the bounds of what is considered appropriate feminine behavior are also policed. Furthermore, the marked experience of gender policing is something all my participants mentioned and something I have also experienced. Before I reached the age of 12, my family was fairly tolerant of my expressions of femininity. Whether it was asking my grandmother to put lipstick on me while she was getting ready at her vanity or asking my mother to buy me Tweety Bird panties so I could be like my female cousin, my requests were usually granted and likely written off as childish inclinations that would pass. However, once I reached adolescence,

my parents more dutifully enforced societal expectations of masculinity by commenting on my deviations from the norm in hopes of correcting them, and my peers clearly communicated their intolerance of my desire to spend more time with girls than boys through verbal and physical violence.

Serano conceptualizes *effemimania* as the "obsession and anxiety over male expressions of femininity" (286) and is a fitting descriptor for the type of gender policing my participants and I experienced. Ducat terms this phenomenon "male femiphobia" and notes that "male femininity is clearly a taboo in a male-dominant culture, in part because women and all things feminine are of lower status" (29). While it may be an easy jump to blame heterosexuals (or at least heterosexism) for this type of disciplining and epistemic violence, my participants expressed their dismay at experiencing similar identity policing from gay men. As Savin-Williams notes, gay boys or men who are masculine enough to "pass" as heterosexual will often denigrate more feminine gay men or scapegoat them as the root cause for homophobia, even though both are oppressed by homophobia. So, while some may think the "gay community" is a safe haven for effeminate men, this is not always the case, as normative views of gender, which are endemic to sexism, permeate society in general.

Teenage identity policing is obviously not an issue peculiar to queer or gender-variant people, but is a common part of teen development and social exploration. Savin-Williams notes that many gender atypical boys received almost universal harassment from their peers. Their lack of interest in traditional gender role behavior and their perceived feminine motor behavior rendered them "weak and deplorable" (100). Whether the abuse was verbal or physical, Savin-Williams found that it "always had emotional and

self-image consequences" (100). The gender policing I experienced from other boys when I was young, led me spend time with girls, who more readily accepted me into their friendship circles. It also led me to explore outlets for self-expression such as academic activities, community theatre, band, music, and debate, which gave the sense of belonging I did not feel I had with most of my school peers. Even though I was successful in all my extracurricular activities, I now realize that busying myself served as a distraction from the emotional trauma and insecurity I experienced, and was overcompensation for my failed performances of masculinity. I hoped my many extracurricular successes would result in my friends respecting me, and my family being proud of me. The psychological effects of my experiences of verbally, epistemically, and physically violent gender policing manifest today in my general fear and distrust of men and my conscious avoidance of settings where performances of hypermasculinity are likely to take place. While homophobia and masculinity are inextricably linked (Connell; Kaufman; Pascoe), examining gender norms in relation to patriarchal culture opens other possibilities for critique and analysis.

Kelly's narrative bridges discussions of transgender identity, sexual orientation, and queerness; although it is important to disclaim that these identities are not mutually exclusive:

> Male privilege is really weird,
> especially when you don't mirror up with it.
> And so for me,
> a feminist perspective very much has to do with my gender stuff.
> It means being really clear about my history,
> and where I've come from,
> and what I've been through,
> and *not* perpetuating white male privilege that's such a part of this society.

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> I've seen so many trans guys go overboard,
> and be really misogynistic,
> and really gross.
> And I think for me,
> holding that space for the feminist perspective in my life,
> is keeping me from doing that.
>
> I made feminism my own in terms of how that works in my life.
> I definitely am *not* part of the mainstream feminism movement in a lot of ways.
> I think identifying as a male
> *and* a feminist
> breaks a lot of stuff down,
> in terms of expectations from people who might not identify as feminist.
> So I think it's really important,
> in a lot of ways,
> for *men* to identify as feminists.
> Then, we can sort of create our own queer versions of feminism,
> and how it works.

Kelly's self-reflexivity in regards to his new found male privilege is impressive. As someone who was assigned male at birth, I lived most of my life not acknowledging my male privilege. In fact, when I was younger, I lamented not feeling as powerful and masculine as other boys and longed for the idealized masculinity I projected onto them. Kelly's struggles with gender identity were more complicated than my own because, even though I was disciplined for not performing normative masculinity, I still had male privilege relative to women. As Kelly narrates below, his transition from female to male led him to think critically about gender roles, which eventually led to a sense of comfort and freedom from the confining aspects of masculinity *and* femininity:

> I think I've been really *intentional* in terms of gender identity…
> in figuring out what's comfortable,
> and what doesn't feel comfortable.
> And having struggled a lot with not really feeling either male *or* female,
> or either a man *or* a woman.
> And, I know a lot of that falls along the lines of cultural expectations
> of what it *means* to be a man or a woman.
> And so as I started coming more and more into my male identity,

in some ways it felt really *restrictive*.
I was having people very explicitly tell me,
"This is what men do"
and "Now you need to do this."
So that was really hard for a while.
And then,
the more I got comfortable,
I *had* to play with it,
and had to go kind of *overboard* on the masculine end
to try to find some middle ground.
Then,
actually,
it became more freeing.
And so for me,
being male is being able to use male privilege
to sort of *break* those expectations down.

Kelly, like Moises, brings an air of creativity and play to his queer identities. Throughout Kelly's narratives, he relays the pleasure he finds in capitalizing on his queerness by strategically changing his identity performances to meet certain ends. Whether he is queering feminism to include his own personal politics, playing with masculinity to expose its constructedness, or emphasizing his maleness to confront male privilege, Kelly's lived experiences exemplify the fluidity of queerness.

Moises, who was assigned male at birth, narrates his continuing struggle to queer maleness even as "biological" forces within his body reinforce masculinity in regards to how his body is read, in our society, as male:

Even though I identify as genderqueer a lot of the time,
I *have* male privilege in a lot of ways,
like in the way that our society functions.
And it's something I struggle with on a daily basis…
Like, how do I use that privilege for the purposes of social justice?
It's not easy by any means,
and there's a lot of *guilt* associated with it too,
because,
first-and-foremost,
biologically,

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I am male and carry those traits.
And my body,
the way I grow facial hair,
and my broad shoulders,
and the way my body's *built*,
is *male*.
And so,
just knowing, that when I walk into a room,
that people have already made assumptions that I am a man.
What that *means* for people is important to consider.
And that's when the gender performance comes into play too, like…
having to check the way that I exhibit masculinity,
or perform masculinity in social circumstances,
or even in my own mind.
Sometimes,
I notice myself taking up large amounts of space for no reason,
other-than-to-take-up-space.
…And acknowledging that, as a performance and exercise of masculinity,
like "This is my space and I control it,"
is important.
I don't want to assert my maleness the same way
that maleness is asserted all around us all the time.
I don't want to contribute to sexism.
So I have to be conscious of that.
There's *that* guilt.
…But then,
I try to utilize my maleness in positive ways,
Like when I'm talking to other men about male privilege.

Moises is aware that his body exhibits signifiers of masculinity that affect how he is perceived. Even as he works to subvert masculinity through his own intellectual reflexivity and in his interactions with other men, the materiality of his body carries with it the historical, political, social, and biological citationality of masculinity, which may be perceived as hegemonic and/or threatening. As a personal example, the fact that I am a feminist who has worked to educate other men about sexual assault does not prevent some women from crossing to the other side of the street at night as I near them on the walk from my office to my car. They do not know I also get a visceral sense of fear and

cross the street when I see a few male undergraduates approaching me on the sidewalk on a weekend night, carrying red cups of alcohol and talking loudly. But I am aware that my male body signifies to them the very same male aggression and male sexual violence that has victimized me, so I acknowledge that their fear is valid and that my body will always carry this citationality no matter how much of a feminist and anti-violence advocate I am.

All the narratives in this section illustrate problematics within the intersection of queerness and maleness. Although the narratives demonstrate intersectional reflexivity through acknowledging connections among patriarchy, masculinity, and sexism, and through a desire to critique male privilege within oneself and in conversation with others, the participants all struggle to negotiate and reconcile their queerness and maleness. The non-normative nature of queerness incongruently collides with the restrictive and normative nature of what our societal expectations of maleness are. Masculinities scholars note variations of masculinity exist on a hierarchy, and any version of masculinity can be read as oppressive in that it reinforces patriarchy (Connell). Hegemonic masculinity tops the hierarchy and is an unattainable ideal that men—gay, straight, and otherwise—are taught to seek and value. Hegemonic masculinity others all men, but some men have more cultural capital than others, which raises them to the top of the hierarchy and closer to hegemonic masculinity. Men may demonstrate and embody hegemonic masculinity through the size and muscularity of their bodies, through sexual conquests, or through attaining wealth and power. By definition, gay men cannot as closely embody hegemonic masculinity as heterosexual men because gay men are feminized in dominant cultural narratives; however, gay men whose performances of

gender and sexuality allow them to "pass" as heterosexual can still embody aspects of hegemonic masculinity that are in turn oppressive to other men (and of course women).

In short, whether one buys into hegemonic masculinity or not, identifying as a male automatically brings with it the social baggage of patriarchy and its subsequent social ills. All men contest and are complicit with hegemonic masculinity because neither contestation nor complicity is an absolute course of action. However, my participants and I critically and reflexively engage the intersection of queerness and maleness and attempt to balance the dialectical tension anchored by contestation and complicity—a tension that will be discussed more in the narratives relevant to the third research question.

Race, Ethnicity, and Privilege: Working the Intersections of Queerness and Culture

While queerness and maleness have been the focus so far, these identities do not exist independently from other cultural identities. Below, Moises and Stanley narrate specific moments in their lives when ethnicity and immigration intersected with familial relationships and the politics of assimilation, and then Kelly recounts how his understanding of whiteness and white privilege problematizes gay rights political discourses.

Moises' narrative explores how his intersecting identities became salient as he changed identifications from Hispanic, to Latino, to Chicano, and from gay to queer—all the while feeling pressure in school and at home to assimilate in order to "be successful":

> It's a struggle and a process to acknowledge my Chicano identity.
> Like, it started with wanting to completely *dissociate*
> from being of any sort of Mexican descent,
> or any sort of Latino descent,
> and changing my name from Moises to Moses,
> to help sort of facilitate that process at a very young age at elementary school.
> And, learning from my mother that I was Hispanic,

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and that I *should* identify as Hispanic.
Meanwhile,
all my school records,
and, then-come-to-find-out, my *birth certificate*,
all say that I'm white.
…And that was my mother's choice to do that.

I sometimes identify as a product of assimilation.
My mother tries really hard not to be in any way affiliated with Mexican-ness.
My mother identifies as Spanish and white and Native American.
She wanted to make sure that I was as successful as I could be,
without things holding me back.
So in all my school records it said I was white,
and I would try to fix it every time I saw it.
My mom's overriding concern was always,
"I want you to be successful. I don't want people to have prejudice against you."
So that means,
not-being-Mexican.
and-not-being-gay,
and being very,
very,
white
and straight.

But then she was always very much, "we're Hispanic."
So I *identified* as Hispanic.
Then, I started to learn about that term and what it meant,
and realized I didn't want to be that.
…Then, I identified as Latino.
I reclaimed my name as Moises.
…And then it wasn't until college that my Chicano identity became more salient.
I started to avow it more.
I always joke around that the *white* institution taught me how to be *brown*.

Thinking about my cultural and ethnic history
has probably been one of the most difficult processes I've ever had to go through,
because,
I have to call into question almost all the stuff that my family has taught me,
or socialized me to believe in.
And I think that obviously the name shift
was probably the most evident of all that.
At a very young age,
kindergarten or first grade,

I learned that because my name was Moises,
and because my name is Mexican,
that people were going to treat me differently.

I remember sitting in kindergarten class,
and really observing,
the way this other Latino student was spoken to,
and how everyone in class treated him,
because he didn't speak English as well as everyone else.
And *he* had a Latino name.
I specifically remember a lot of picking on him,
which was only accentuated by the teacher not being able to *pronounce* his name.
And so quickly I was like,
"Oh crap!"
"I don't want that same association
of the teacher needing to explain things to me differently
because she can't pronounce my name correctly."
That sort of quick observance,
of the way those students were treated,
not only by the teacher,
but by other students,
made *me* make sure I was far from that,
so I made sure my name was easier for them to pronounce.

Moises' experiences illustrate the politics of assimilation in that accommodating the authority figures around him, he was forced to give up some of his culture, heritage, and identity. The narrative also exposes the cultural politics of representation in that the pervasive image of success in U.S. society is white, masculine, and heterosexual. Whether he is explicitly told to assimilate by authority figures or implicitly told to assimilate through political discourses and cultural narratives, dissonance and incongruency develop as identities push and pull on points of intersection. Moises feels this dissonance especially between his queer and Chicano identities:

It's been difficult negotiating my queer and Chicano identity.
The high school I went to was 58 percent Latino,
and so I was known as the "loud gay kid."
My Chicano identity really wasn't salient.
It also wasn't something I was very conscious of,

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because I was *surrounded* by it all the time.
I was only known as the "gay kid,"
and not as the "Chicano kid."
People *were* like, "You can't be both."
And I got a lot of that.
I feel comfortable with those two identities,
when they're both salient,
I guess,
only in certain areas.
For example,
when I'm back home,
I don't feel I can really embody both of them.
There was an issue with my father where he was like,
"I don't like how effeminate you are around your brothers and sisters."
"You really need to make a decision which one you're going to be."
"Part of the family or gay or effeminate?"

But ,it's also very scary,
like going to immigration rallies,
and being worried that someone is going to call me out,
or read me as gay,
and be like, "You don't belong here!"
even though *my* grandmother emigrated from Mexico.
And it's always challenging regardless of what community I'm in,
unless it's a community where I feel that I'm in a *conscious* group of people,
who *know* about these issues,
and are okay with me identifying as both.
I feel like I've gotten a lot like policing,
…identity policing.

Moises' identity policing extends from school, to political activities, to his interpersonal interactions with family members. At the intersection of his Chicano and queer identities he must make conscious decisions about which identity to foreground even though both are salient.

Others, especially Chicana feminists Moraga and Anzaldúa, have shared Moises' confliction regarding his intersecting identities. Moraga recounts, through narrative and poetry, similar struggles to reconcile her Chicana, Anglo, and lesbian identities. Moises and Moraga both deal with pressure to assimilate into whiteness, and both reclaim their

Chicana/o heritage in adulthood, which was suppressed while growing up within their families. Moraga describes her experiences at home and interprets her mother's motivations for dissociating with "Chicana/o":

> [My mother] often called other lower-income Mexicans "braceros" or "wet-backs," referring to herself and her family as "a different class of people." And yet, the real story was that my family, too, had been poor (and some still are) and farmworkers…This is something she would like to forget (and rightfully), for to her, on a basic economic level, being Chicana meant being "less." It was through my mother's desire to protect her children from poverty and illiteracy that we became "anglicized"; the more effectively we could pass in the white world, the better guaranteed our future. (43)

Moraga's narrative, like Moises', exposes how politics of race are embedded into cultural discourses regarding success. Moraga states that the oppressor often succeeds at externalizing his fears by projecting them onto the body of the "other" through various discourses and imagery. In this case, discourses and images of "success" are white and wealthy, while discourses and images of "failure" include the poor and people of color. Moraga argues that "others" internalize this "oppressive imagery" (48), because doing so means identifying with cultural narratives of success in terms of assimilation and seeking the "American Dream," while identifying with one's own class, race, or ethnicity means becoming a failure and then being blamed for your failure by culturally prevalent myths of meritocracy. So, embedded within the politics of representation are racial and cultural politics that maintain white supremacy and classism, reinforcing cultural othering across a range of identities.

As I mentioned earlier, Anzaldúa theorizes the intersection of sexuality and culture as an important part of queer consciousness through her concept of the "new mestiza," which is especially relevant to Moises' struggles with his Chicano, gender,

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class, and sexual orientation identities. Anzaldúa has a similar cultural background to Moises, and her poetic and personal writings convey the confliction that she, Moises, and others with multiple marginalized identities feel. The unfair mandate to choose between identities and allegiances to those identities, as if that were possible, concretizes cultural boundaries, attempts to fill in the leaks and suture together the fissures between borders, and close borderlands that exist within people who occupy multiple marginalized identities. While Moises has felt out of place in gay male communities and out of place around his family, he finds agency and support, as he shares in later narratives, through education, theory, and his chosen queer communities. While I, as a queer white man, have experienced identity policing in regards to my family's working class background, my sexuality, and my non-normative performances of masculinity, I have rarely been disciplined or surveilled due to my race. My racial identity has only been policed when I crossed racial lines to be friends with, live with, or have romantic relationships with people of color. Essentially, my race has become salient only because of personal choices, unlike Moises and other people of color who are always already marked as marginal.

Stanley also narrates his struggles negotiating culture and ethnicity and his parents desire to see him succeed through assimilation. As a child, Stanley, then female-identified, experienced incongruency on multiple levels. As he narrates later, he felt he did not live up to his family's expectations regarding his gender performance and physical appearance, but Stanley also experienced liminality while serving as a language and cultural translator for his immigrant parents:

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As long as I can remember,
I've always felt like I didn't fit *norms* very well.
And I spent a lot of time blaming myself for that.
So, any opportunity I had to fit a norm,
to perform something that would make me fit in better,
I would take it.

I've struggled with assimilation on a number of different levels.
As I mentioned, my parents are immigrants,
so their culture isn't *typical* American culture.
And they wanted me to *succeed* in this society and this culture.
So, to a certain extent, they wanted me to assimilate.
They wanted me to assimilate enough to be successful,
but they didn't want me to assimilate so much that I was *too* American.
So, I spent my whole life walking a tightrope.
Though, once I became an adult,
it became clear to me that I was definitely American,
and not especially Italian.
So I guess I assimilated whether-I-wanted-to-or-not.
Because I was feeling oppositional to my family,
and feeling conspicuous as a child,
and as a teenager,
I sort of *deliberately* became American,
because I didn't want to have anything in common with my family.

I spent a lot of the years leading up to early adulthood feeling bicultural,
having to act as an interpreter for both sides,
trying to interpret not just the English language,
but U.S. culture to my parents,
and then trying to take the cultural touchstones of my parents,
and contextualize them in some sort of American context.
It never worked very well.

Stanley's desire to assimilate undoubtedly resulted from self-blame that he internalized—

blame that originated in explicit and implicit discourses and images from the individuals

and institutions in his life that marked him as deficient. Like Moises, Stanley treads the

borderlands between his queer, gender, and cultural identities.

Moises and Stanley's narratives exemplify what Anzaldúa calls the "divided

loyalties" that come with certain identities. Other scholars have also explored these

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complicated, political, and cultural relationships with their personal stories of recuperating family and cultural histories in the process of working from confliction to liberation (Yep, "My Three") and the lifelong process of acknowledging their dominant and subordinate identities (Tatum). Unpacking these intersections exposes the ways in which ideologies of white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchy infiltrate cultures and identities, and how they become visible through the ideological work of suturing together the inevitable ruptures that occur as power attempts to fix and essentialize the complexity of multiple identities.

Intersections of queerness and culture are not only present in the narratives of Moises and Stanley. Whiteness, an often-overlooked cultural influence, is framed as an important part of the identities of my white participants, who all identify white privilege as something that needs to be addressed and critiqued. Since all my participants also self-identify as social justice activists, they not only seek to address white privilege within themselves, but also in their interactions with others by exposing the politics of white supremacy. Warren states unacknowledged whiteness "maintains cultural privilege and power…[and] goes unquestioned, uncritiqued, and unchallenged" ("Doing Whiteness" 94). Kelly, a community organizer and activist specifically notes his investment in broad-based social justice and his critiques of the gay rights movement's lack of accounting for race and privilege:

> So, a lot of white people,
> who are experiencing homophobia,
> are *so* consumed by homophobia that they can't see connections to racism,
> or they can't see how queer people of color are experiencing racism,
> or how homophobia might play out within communities of color.
> And it becomes about,
> "Okay, so I'm talking about homophobia,

and well your community is fucked up because they're homophobic."
As opposed to,
"My community is screwing you over
because we're being racist,
because we're being classist,
because of all these other things."
I've heard gay rights people saying,
"Racism has been fixed."
"So, homophobia is the last thing we need to work on."
And there's no acknowledgement of what is *continuing* to exist today.

The sort of inter-group blaming Kelly references oftentimes comes from a place of unacknowledged privilege and underlying racism that ends up reinforcing oppression in order to make a political argument that benefits the dominant group and essentializes the "other." Kelly rightly alludes to how racism is seen as a non-issue by many whites who ignore or deny that the color of one's skin, be it white, brown, or black, has contemporary relevance to the history of racial inequality; a history they view as far removed and resolved (Warren, "Doing Whiteness" 98-101). Kelly's queer consciousness is intersectional and inclusive in that he has self-reflexively identified his own white privilege, so his perception of other social justice issues such as racism an classism are filtered through his cultural identities, which are acknowledged and accounted for rather than left unmarked. Tensions between race and sexual orientation that Kelly mentions gained public attention in the 2008 election.

Proposition 8, a 2008 California ballot measure sought to reverse the state court's decision allowing same-sex marriage. When the Proposition passed, some gay and lesbian people publicly blamed Latinos and African-Americans who turned out in record numbers for the 2008 election. However, the blaming of people of color ignored how race has fit or not fit into the gay rights movement. Leading up to Election Day, NPR reported

that protestors outside the State Capitol Building in Sacramento carried signs reading "Gay is the New Black," and lesbian activist Robin Tyler said at a conference, "This is a civil rights movement" (Bates). In the same interview, Jasmyne Cannick, a former politician who self-identifies as Black and lesbian, said comments comparing gay and Black people were "exactly why more Black Californians didn't vote against Proposition 8. White activists' insistence on linking the two movements—marriage equality and racial equality—was automatically rejected by many Black voters." She went on to say, "Just as Black churches don't often address the homophobic strain that runs through the Black community, gays and lesbians don't easily speak about the racism that is silently present in their community." The analogies made between gay rights and civil rights suppress historical tensions between these two movements, a rhetorical strategy that presents a façade of coalition. This current event explicitly brought to the surface political tensions regarding intersections of race and sexual orientation that have been present within and between social movements for decades (Stockdill 46-50).

Acknowledging my whiteness has also been an important part of my growth as an academic and an activist. My exposure to academic scholarship by people of color started slowly in my master's curriculum and increased in my doctoral training. My reaction to this new exposure was two-fold. First, I felt frustrated and deprived because the scholarship I was now reading was so relevant to my own personal and academic struggles, and I wanted to know why this body of literature had not been availed to me earlier. Second, I felt guilty because I had not sought out this literature sooner, and I realized I had been comfortable in my place as a white man in the academy, reading scholarship by other white academics. Since, I have productively channeled both of those

emotions into my scholarly commitments to intersectionality and critical inquiry, and my activist commitments to broad-based social justice work and the interrogation of privilege.

As I noted in Chapter Three, unacknowledged privilege is at least partially responsible for the warranted critiques of early queer theory as whitewashed, exclusive, not intersectional. While new queer studies is recuperating the voices that were largely left out of the development of queer theory, radical queer activism, which was present in early gay liberation before queer was even reclaimed and has sporadically emerged in the '80s and '90s, has given way to well-monied, visible, and powerful "gay rights" groups whose assimilationist political agendas exclude those at the margins. While many gay leaders' perceptions of culture seem to be limited by their unacknowledged privilege, queer activism, as practiced by my participants and I, acknowledges more the complexity of privileges and disadvantages that come with intersecting identities, which in most cases prioritizes social justice issues like racism and classism over legislative issues such as gay marriage.[35] While a more detailed discussion of the relationship between gay rights and queerness is forthcoming, the narratives presented and analyzed above illustrate the complicated ways in which queer men experience their identities in their day-to-day lives. The narratives demonstrate how the participants think of their identities

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[35] Activism exists in many forms, and I do not want to judge the genuineness or effectivity of another person or group's activism. I also acknowledge that legislative activism can and does contribute to social justice. However, by drawing on my participants' personal narratives and my own political commitments, I distinguish between activism that focuses on broad-based social issues like racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism, which I term social justice activism, and activism that focuses on legislative change. While legislative change is often supported by lobbying and professional politicians, I argue that social justice activism is led by grassroots organizers, activists, and educators who are rarely as well monied and who strive for social change through critical thinking and critical approaches that seek to change societal structures by speaking truth to power, rather than by changing laws. Both approaches are productive and needed; however, my political inclinations privilege grassroots activism over decision-making by ruling elites.

in intersectional ways, trace their journeys toward identifying as queer, explore what

queerness and maleness mean to them and the problematics inherent in the intersection of

queerness and maleness, and reflexively explore the political implications of race,

ethnicity, and privilege within intersecting identities.

Queering the Body Politic

The narratives presented above answer my first question, which was, "How do

queer men experience their identities?" This exploratory and introductory question leads

into the next question, which asks how queer men experience their identities, specifically

in relation to their bodies and personal politics. I asked two broad questions to begin

eliciting narratives, which were "What does it mean to have a queer body?" and "What

does it mean to have queer politics?" The narratives that emerged connect queerness to

body image and gender issues, particulary maleness and masculinity. In terms of politics,

themes of intersectionality and social justice discussed in the previous section become

more developed and set up the third section of analysis, which focuses on how queer

identities contribute to and contest mainstream representations of gay male bodies and

political discourses relating to gay rights.

I asked about queer bodies because of my experiences as a queer male and my

own struggles with my "non-normative" body. While I know there is no singular

normative body, I, like many people, bought into (and sometimes still do) representations

of trim, muscular, and well-groomed male bodies. Although my idealization of this

intangible body was unwavering, my attempts to emulate it were unsuccessful, leading to

self-denigration and low self-esteem. My long history of dissatisfaction with my non-

muscular body, that has been more or less overweight since adolescence, took a

psychological toll that was only made more prominent by my participation in gay male culture, which from my experience was image obsessed and not inclusive of various body types. As someone who appreciates and finds attractive a wide-range of body types, ages, and ethnicities, I found myself frustrated by the shallowness of many gay men with whom I interacted. Years later, as I explored queer theory and queer culture, I found more body inclusivity. As I read queer writing and met queer friends, seeing images of and hearing positive commentary on a range of bodies from big to small, smooth to hairy, younger to older, and light to dark, helped me think of my own body in more positive ways, and I wondered if other queer men shared similar experiences.

What does it Mean to have a Queer Body?

Masculinity and femininity have been present as themes in previous narratives but become more explicitly corporeal in Kelly and Stanley's narratives below. Specifically, they cite their transition from female-identified to male-identified as experiences where the queerness of their bodies became salient. Then, Stanley and Alex connect body image issues extending from childhood to their notion of queer bodies. Finally, stories of exoticization and commodification in Erik and Moises' narratives highlight how issues of race and ethnicity intersect with sexuality to mark and queer bodies.

Kelly's narrative explores how his transgender and male identities intersect with common (mis)conceptions regarding sexual orientation to constitute his queer body:

> I feel like queer bodies are anything that aren't…
> the standard image of what's masculine and feminine.
> And so people who are *able* to be outside of that,
> and *embrace* that feels pretty queer,
> regardless of who you sleep with.
> And so, I mean, for me,
> identifying as transgender,

I have stories of people who sort of "get" gender stuff,
but have problems with language.
So like one night,
I was hanging out with a former co-worker
and I was like,
"Okay if I sleep with a woman, what am I?"
And he says,
"You're a lesbian."
I was like,
"Well…that's weird."
And then I thought about it for a second and asked,
"Okay if I sleep with a man then, what am I?"
And he says,
"Gay."
And it was this *amazing* moment,
where I realized that I can *only* have queer sex,
no matter who I date.
And so for me,
my body does feel really queer,
because when I'm in a relationship with people—
I think because of the way society says
I have this incongruency
with my gender and my sex—
it's going to be queer no matter what.
And for me,
it makes total sense.
My body *is* part of my queer identity.
It's part of who I am.
And it's *not* this disconnect for me,
which I know for other people it sometimes is.
But for me,
personally,
I *like* my body,
…I like the way it works.

Kelly's pivotal moment of realizing and understanding his queer body in new ways

helped him come to terms with the ways in which society may read his body as queer.

His co-worker in this instance seems unable to reconcile the way he reads Kelly's

"biological sex" as female and his gender performance as a gay man. Kelly is right in

realizing that his "ability" to be read as a lesbian in one scenario and read as a gay man in

another is admittedly queer. For my participants and I, this fluidity and room to play with

gender and sexuality that is facilitated by a queer identity is liberating when compared to

the more narrow possibilities within the sexual and social labels of heterosexual, gay, and

lesbian.

While Kelly focuses on queer bodies in terms of masculinity and femininity,

Stanley discusses queer bodies in broader contexts and then recounts how his surgical

history effects the way he and society may view his body as queer:

> Having a queer body…
> means having a body that doesn't conform to *standards*
> of what an attractive body is.
> So, it could mean you're
> "too fat,"
> or perhaps you're "too thin."
> Or perhaps you have a visible disability,
> or just something that puts you in this *other* category,
> because you're considered sexually unattractive.
>
> I feel like my body is *pretty* queer on a number of levels.
> In addition to my size,
> I had male-chest-reconstruction-surgery,
> but I haven't really done anything "below the belt."
> So, if I was hanging out naked,
> with a bunch of men,
> my body would definitely be *marked* as different.
> If I was hanging out with a bunch of naked women,
> my body would be different there too.

Stanley continues on to discuss how his "top surgery" to remove female appearing

breasts made his own view of his body less queer in that his anatomy matched more with

his gender identity. However, as he notes in the narrative above, his surgery made his

body *more* queer to society in that his nude body would be read as queer by males and

females because of his "incongruent" anatomy. Like Kelly, Stanley works to reclaim his

queer body as a positive. Even though being labeled as different has some negative

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psychic side effects, embracing queerness may allow us to validate our bodies. Again, the

narratives in this section are hallmarked by moments of "not fitting in" or feeling

incongruent with other communities. Stanley's story shows how congruency is always

relative, as his body simultaneously became *less* incongruent to him and *more*

incongruent to mainstream society, which is indeed a queer series of events.

Even though people's bodies change throughout their lives and may become more

or less self-satisfactory, all my participants mention having body image issues extending

from childhood. Stanley's self-consciousness of his body developed as a result of his

family and peer group's policing of his unconventional performances of gender. At this

young age, Stanley was female-identified and struggled with the conventions of

femininity that were imposed on him:

> Thinking about my body has pretty much been a constant throughout my life.
> And I don't know how much of that comes from having had lifelong body issues,
> partially because I was raised female,
> *and* because I had family members who were very…
> "concerned" with my appearance.
> Not just my size,
> but how long my hair was,
> and did I wax my eyebrows, and so on.
> And so I always felt like I couldn't meet these standards.
> And I felt,
> because I couldn't meet these standards,
> I must be a freak.
> …That's pretty queer.
>
> A lot of it has to do with my parents…
> with my mother specifically,
> but my father was also complicit.
> …They have issues about my size,
> and my parents have been giving me grief about it for as long as I can remember.
>
> People made comments about how I was fat
> and I was going to die young.
> …I internalized this stuff,

and just thought that no one would ever be attracted to me…
ever…
or ever have any sort of romantic interest in me,
and I would die alone or something.

I spent a lot of my childhood
having to deal with *other* people's body issues
being projected on to me,
and being on diets,
against my will…
when I was in third grade.
And, it was always a real source of shame.
My mom was always looking for a quick fix,
and-she-isn't-skeptical-of, sort of, ridiculous health claims,
so she had me doing Herbalife,
and *then* she had me doing Slimfast.
I think my childhood is ridiculous enough at school,
without being an 8-year-old toting Slimfast.

Since I was about 6 to 7, I had been hearing about how ugly I am,
and by association,
how unattractive my body is.
And so that message is coming out pretty early on.
I internalized it.
I internalized this idea that my body was always going to be different…
from what was expected of other people's.
…And not in a good way.
…Different, in a very *obviously* negative sort of way.
So I don't know.
I mean, it's something I've always sort of carried around with me.

And then later,
I'm not sure what happened exactly,
but when I was in college,
I heard about fat acceptance.
I think I heard about the 'zine called "Fat Girl,"
and I found a used copy of this anthology,
called "Shadow on a Tightrope."
And so all these things,
kind of coalesced into my being interested in fat acceptance.

Earlier, Stanley recounted an episode of gender policing when he, then female-identified,

was disciplined by other girls for not shaving his armpits. Here, we see a connection to

other body issues such as weight and attractiveness, and how internalizing others'

messages that mark one as deficient in some way, transcends genders. Aside from

internalizing discourses of deficiency, Stanley was forced to change his body by being

put on diets. Here, identity policing moves from verbal messages that cause epistemic

trauma, to physical control that negatively effects the mind and body. As with his

exposure to queer theory, Stanley marks his exposure to fat acceptance literature as an

exigent moment in his consciousness development.

The theme of "body positivity," which is developed more in forthcoming

narratives, emerges as Stanley identifies with the "fat acceptance" movement. The "fat

acceptance" movement or the "fat activist" movement has been led mostly by women,

many of them specifically espousing a feminist critique of narrow representations of

female bodies (Brown and Rothblum; Rabin). While we may assume the near absence of

men in this movement is due to more societal pressure being put on women than men to

meet certain standards of beauty, similar pressures to meet body ideals are pervasive in

much contemporary gay male culture and are increasingly becoming prevalent among the

general male population (Harrison). In Chapter One, I connected representations of the

body, identity, and late-capitalism, a relationship illustrated in the following cycle: Body

ideals are sold to people vis-à-vis advertising and other cultural discourses, which are

internalized by consumers, creating demand for products to enhance their

bodies/appearance that are sold in the lucrative health and beauty market (Hennessey;

Sender). This cycle commodifies gay identities and maleness in new ways. As Harrison

notes in her discussion of metrosexuality, "Clearly, the concept of masculinity is

undergoing significant social change as many men re-evaluate their appearance,

reposition themselves as consumers of fashion and style products, and ultimately re-construct their idea of what it is to be male" (56). So, as stereotypes of the well groomed and dressed gay man expand to include men in general, marketing for male health and beauty products moves from niche to widespread, and narrow representations of what men should look like proliferate, creating more consumers and more body self-consciousness and exclusion. All my participants discussed their body image in relation to feelings of ostracization from mainstream representations of what bodies of gay men "should" look like. While espousing a queer identity does not instantly fix one's body image issues, perhaps Stanley's progression from this early childhood torment to his later work with "fat acceptance," and my other participants' movement from body negativity to body positivity, demonstrates the ways in which a queer consciousness may lead them to critique and contest idealized and narrow representations of bodies.

Like Stanley, Alex's narrative entails plastic surgery on his breasts. However, Alex's surgery resulted from a medical condition called gynecomastia and occurred at a young age. Alex also recounts struggles with his weight and how he sought to attain a "normal" body under the guidance of a female body builder. Even now, as he continues to evaluate and reevaluate his body, Alex is frustrated by representations of what a gay male body "should be" and the self-consciousness these images continue to instill:

> Having a queer body is related to the body issues I've had all my life.
> I think it has a lot to do with the feeling of your *body betraying* you.
> You know…
> how you feel that your body should be one way,
> but it's not,
> and *never* will be.
>
> When I was in puberty, I developed gynecomastia.
> In puberty some men grow breasts,

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and usually they go away,
and usually they're not very pronounced.
Mine were *not very* subtle,
and did not go away.
…And it wasn't just like fatty tissue,
it was *actually* breast tissue that I was growing.
So, I-basically-had-a-double-mastectomy
before I entered my senior year of high school.
…And so, I had a lot of body shame,
basically through my entire life,
and currently as well.
…I still have large scars across my chest.
The surgery was not as sophisticated as they are now.
I was basically binding my breasts before then,
and I had to bind afterwards for the healing process.

I remember going to a personal trainer in high school that my dad got for me.
I remember saying,
"I just want a normal body. I just want a normal body."
She's like, "We can do that!"
…I'm saying this to a woman who is *built* like a linebacker.
Her name was *Rhonda*,
and she was blonde,
with big nails,
and really big muscles.
When *I* was working out with Rhonda,
I was like 5'9" or 5'10",
and about 300 pounds of
pure
preadolescent
fat.
And Rhonda,
she must have been around 6 feet tall and really tan—
of course, I'm pasty as all hell.
She had big arms,
because she was a professional body-builder.
And she had these long nails that were always painted for showing off.
And I remember she had big blonde hair,
with-something-keeping-it-out-of-her-face,
and bangs,
and makeup,
…lots of makeup.
But it was this weird mix,
you know,
of this professional body-builder chick,

and this fat reject queer boy.
…I loved her,
she was great.
But I'm asking this woman who is *not* normal,
and she says she can *make* me *normal*.
And…I have no idea what that meant really.

I had a huge transformation at this time when I went to my dad's.
He thought the root of my problem was the fact that I was *fat*,
and didn't have self-confidence.
So, he got me a personal trainer,
and a dietitian,
and walked me in and made me go out for the football team,
and made me go to the track,
and basically *made* me an athlete.
Before *and* during this time I had an eating disorder—
the-classic-compulsive-eat-your-feelings.
And then, I went to the *other* spectrum of just not eating,
and bulimia as well.
So, I was working out, throwing up, and/or not eating,
and I'd count my calories.
I found some of my old calorie sheets when my dad moved,
and I was looking at them,
and some days I was only eating *one power bar*.
And sometimes I'd go into the garage,
where my dad stored little chewy bars,
and I would just eat the
whole
fucking
box!
…And then, I'd get in the shower,
turn on the radio,
and vomit it up.
…I was very tidy about it.

I include Alex's narrative at length because it shows, with great specificity, the ongoing

trauma related to body image that a "fat reject queer boy" could experience. Alex also

demonstrates the lengths to which someone who feels excluded will go to comport

themselves to fit an ideal. Alex not only has to deal with the social and body shame

associated with gynecomastia and a traumatic surgery and recovery that left permanent

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physical scars, he is also made to work out with Rhonda, consult a dietician, and involuntarily play sports. Although forced to engage in these activities in order to remake his queer body into a more normative one, Alex's confidence was not dramatically changed; rather, internalizing messages of deficiency led to more body self-consciousness and even an eating disorder.

I find resonance in Alex's story, as I too have succumbed to the pressure to be thin, fit, and muscular by seeking out personal trainers, nutritionists, and going on fad diets, all resulting in a large financial investment that never pays off emotionally or psychologically. While I cannot personally relate to Alex's surgical procedure, Yost's book *Demystifying Gynecomastia: Men with Breasts* discusses the social and psychological turmoil that may effect men and boys with gynecomastia and especially the trauma that can come with often taken for granted acts such as removing one's shirt in public. Further into his narrative, Alex recounts using a back brace, prior to his surgery, to compress his growing breasts and wearing windbreakers or other layered clothing to try to conceal the view of his chest, all of which Yost notes is common among boys and men with gynecomastia. Like Stanley, Alex has progressed toward body positivity and has exhibited publicly self-portraits that highlight the remaining physical and emotional scars of his adolescent double mastectomy. While all people; gay men, lesbians, and heterosexual men and women, experience such body image issues, these narratives illustrate the ways in which a queer consciousness may create an epistemic and discursive space that contests constrained views of what is considered desirable and attractive.

At the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, Erik and Moises, who identify as queer males of color, recount how their queer consciousness led them to

reinterpret some of their encounters with gay men who have exoticized and commodified

them. Erik starts by narrating how the "compliments" he has received about his

appearance included veiled racism:

> I didn't realize a lot of the racism
> in the gay community
> before I identified as queer.
> A lot of guys I've dated,
> are always like,
> "Oh you're so cute,
> your skin,
> you look like you always have a tan,
> it's really nice,
> you're never pale."
> And I never realized it when I was younger,
> that it was like racism in a sense.
> …The people that are like that, treat me really dominating.
> So it's kind of like,
> "Oh, you're so hot, but you're not intelligent."
> "You're not able to do anything."
> "Here, let me take care of you."
> And they just don't understand that I'm like an independent person.
> …And I've noticed those people tend to only have brown friends,
> like brown gay men friends.
> …And they abuse those relationships, because they know,
> that brown gay men have identity issues like,
> "Oh, no one loves us. So any love we can get, we take."

Erik's experiences highlight issues specific to sexual minorities who are also racial or

ethnic minorities. Aside from feeling objectified, Erik also feels dominated. Having one's

insecurities manipulated and/or taken advantage of could also result in psychological and

physical trauma. Erik's narrative points to the personal and material consequences

resulting from his identities being essentialized, commodified, or ignored in mainstream

gay culture; all of which are important themes discussed through the remainder of this

section.

Moises' experiences extend Erik's discussion of intersecting identities through his

realization that his multiple marginalized identities meant becoming part of the "gay

mainstream" was an unattainable goal:

There's a lot of times in the gay community,
where I feel like I *can't* be Latino,
I can *only* be gay.
Like, if-I-reference-something-about-my-culture-in-Spanish,
or something,
people will give me funny looks.
Or, it's exoticized in this like very nasty way.
…Being Latino can mean being oppressed in the gay community,
but Latinos can also be exoticized.
We call them "bean queens."
…And I *understand* when people are attracted to Latinos,
and I get that.
I'm attracted to Latino people as well,
like "right on."
But it gets to the point of,
"Oh I love your brown skin"
"I really like the way your hips move when you dance,"
you know picking out these specific stereotypical identity markers,
and really only liking those.
…Being attracted to specific stereotypes,
it's really just very shallow to me.
When people are like,
"Oh my gosh your skin's so beautiful, you're so brown!"
I'm like,
"I'm *more* than that."
"I'm *more* than just this brown body who you want to have sex with."
…Like when people call me "Papi"…
I'm kind of like,
"You have no idea, you know nothing about me."

From my experience,
it's very evident in the gay community,
especially among white gay men who,
a lot of times feel very *entitled* to be like,
"Oh, you're so beautiful because you're Mexican!"
…And it's really shocking.

But some Latinos also play into that exoticization.
…I definitely went through the like,

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"Oh, look I'm *really* Latino."
"You should be attracted to me."
I definitely pulled that card.
There's a degree of like,
"Oh my god people are giving me attention, people find me attractive,"
though it's for very shallow, vain reasons.
But then, there's the other side.
Some people are like,
"Oh I don't like Latinos."
Or people will blatantly tell me,
"I don't hook up with Latinos, I don't hook up with Mexicans."

Moises' story illustrates the bind he and other people of color may experience within gay communities. While he finds acceptance in one area of the gay community, with "bean queens," or white gay men who prefer dating and/or sex with Latinos, obvious frustration and other negative psychological effects stem from objectification. Further complicating this bind are other gay men who may reject him off-hand because of his ethnicity. Erik and Moises do not only experience their bodies in queer ways as a result of their race or ethnicity. Later, Erik discusses his frustration with the labels used in gay male culture to describe one's body type, and in the following narrative, Moises discusses how his body image issues relating to weight are further complicated by his ethnic and class identities:

I've struggled with my weight since I was very young.
Around the same time,
I wanted to wear Abercrombie and Fitch,
and quickly learned that I need to lose weight.
And, not-that-I-was-overweight by any means.
I just did not have the very tight,
stereotypical twinkish body.

Part of that process was also realizing that,
I'm *never* going to be like that,
because I'm also Mexican, or of Mexican descent.
…Because I'm a person of color,
I can never *really* be a twink…like from what I've observed.
I cannot be both,
because the stereotypical twink is *white*

and *skinny*,
and *toned*,
and all these things.

And so now I'm like,
"Well good, I *don't* want to be like that."
"If I can't be it, why would I want to try?"
…But, it's still been like this,
underlying sort of issue,
resulting in minor degrees of anorexia that have come and gone…
but nothing ever too serous.
…But definitely having thoughts like,
"I want gay men to be attracted to me. How do I do that?"
"Well I can't afford the clothes."
"I can't afford the material possessions of what it means to be like a hot gay
man."
"So what's another way that I can act so that people find me attractive?"
"What do I have control of?"
"Well, I control my weight to a degree, right, so my body."
So that continues to be a venue for affirmation or affection.

Moises' ethnicity and socio-economic status prevent him from finding complete

identification with idealized gay male bodies, which is white and monied. While he

cannot change his ethnicity or quickly change his socio-economic status, Moises can alter

his appearance through dieting and clothing. Even after realizing his efforts will be futile

and reclaiming his difference as a positive by saying, "I don't want to be like that,"

Moises ends this narrative by revealing that controlling and using his body as a vehicle

for increased social capital, affirmation, and affection is an ongoing thought process. So,

even though he is rejected by some segments of gay male culture, he can use his body to

appeal to other segments that may desire of even commodify him.

Calafell (*Latina/o*) explores intersections of ethnicity and sexuality in the case of

Ricky Martin who becomes, through his mass-produced popular cultural imagery, "an

object to be accessed, leered at, and lusted over" (104). While this type of objectification

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is problematic, it is erroneous to assume that there is no agency in this discursive space, as demonstrated in Moises' discussion of how he "played the Latino card" to gain cultural capital that he may have been denied otherwise. Such discourses of objectification are fueled by fantasies of sexualized racial difference and the ostensible transgression that results.

hooks (*Black Looks*) claims dominant cultures often exoticize or objectify the pleasure or spice they perceive to be embodied by "cultural others." She also states that white culture is sometimes thought of as a bland dish, like white rice, that needs or desires the exotic spice of the other. Aside from desiring exotic spices, people in dominant social positions may seek out or even fetishize the transgression they feel when they have an encounter with the other. They not only want to engage with, possess, and consume the other, they also want to be changed by the other. The "transgressor" may covet this transformation, perceiving it as a badge of honor that proves they are progressive and not racist. However, hooks rightly problematizes this notion by acknowledging that crossing racial lines does not require one to give up their privileged positionality permanently, if at all. Furthermore, while some may see the instrumentality of these relationships as one-way—as the transgressor taking advantage of the other— agency and power are much more complex and are at work in multiple ways in these relationships. People of color may work these relationships in order to cash in the cultural capital they possess in the eyes of the fetishist for social capital, monetary capital, companionship, affection, or sexual gratification; giving them a sense of belonging to which they may be denied access in other instances. While some may slip into a

moralizing position that blames the white "transgressor" or the "other," blaming either obfuscates systematic and institutional contexts that privilege some and oppress others.

Although not specific to Latino men in U.S. American culture, relevant research by scholars in Australia explores the ways in which some Asian men purposefully adopt a hyper-masculine persona and engage in bodybuilding as a way to divert stereotypes of feminized Asian masculinity and mirror popular cultural representations of buff, smooth gay men (Ridge, Hee, & Minichiell). Asian men are also commodified and objectified by some white men whose label "rice queens" is the cultural equivalent of the Latino-chaser's "bean queens" (Chuang). A similar kind of fetishization also occurs when Black male bodies are objectified through the white gaze as hypermasculine, hypersexual, animalistic or otherwise transgressive. This type of exoticization is explored in detail by such scholars as Stockton in her book *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where 'Black' Meets "Queer"* and hooks in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*.

Like Erik, Moises alludes to the already existing self-consciousness of people of color within gay and lesbian communities, which is supported by Espin and Chan's research which found that gay men and lesbians who identified as Latino/a or Asian-American desire to have their ethnic *and* sexual orientation identities validated, but find publicly avowing their sexual orientation identities negates their cultural identities. These narratives highlight how the complex intersections of culture, gender, and sexual orientation have material effects ranging from body image issues to surgical intervention, to eating disorders and low self-esteem. As the participants developed a queer consciousness, they found new ways to validate their bodies by questioning and critiquing narrow representations of what it means to be male, female, or gay, among

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others. However, my participants and I all continue to struggle with body image issues,

but the narratives trace the changes in body image as we try to embrace our queer bodies

and promote body positivity. Now, I turn to a similar discussion of queer politics.

What does it Mean to have Queer Politics?

Historically, gay rights and queer activism were not always as distinct.

Communication scholars Rand ("Disunited") and Slagle ("In Defense") have discussed

the radical rhetorical strategies of Queer Nation, and others have explored ACT UP as a

model of rhetorical resistance (Christiansen and Hanson; Deluca). While there were

always more radical and more assimilationist individuals and groups within the gay rights

movement, the assimilationist wing garnered more attention and funding, creating a

clearer distinction between gay rights and a more radical queer perspective. Turning to a

historical overview of the progression of the gay liberation movement shows that while

people at the fringes of society provoked the beginning of the movement, they were

overshadowed by people who had more resources in terms of social and cultural capital

that soon took over the direction of the movement.

D'Emilio (*Sexual*) and Jagose chart the history of the gay rights movement.

Jagose discusses the movement in stages, although not positing these stages as clearly

bordered or defined. She traces the genealogy of how grassroots activist movements

related to and informed the later development of queer theory. Early gay liberationists

called for the same societal revolution that many queer activists in the 1990s and a

dwindling number of queer activists today are calling for. Many people insisted that

"only a radical change to society could bring about genuine acceptance of

homosexuality" (Jagose 58). D'Emilio ("Capitalism") states: "Early gay liberationists had

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argued that sexuality was malleable and fluid ('polymorphously perverse') and that

homosexuality and heterosexuality were both oppressive social categories designed to

contain the erotic potential of human beings" (263). As Piontek states:

> Gay liberationists considered themselves a component of the [60's] radical
> movement for social change, part of a front in the political sense of the word (a
> collection of groups). They saw gay oppression as one social issue among many
> and also opposed capitalism, racism, sexism, and the Vietnam War. (17)

These calls for societal upheaval were overshadowed and then dwindled as early gay

liberationists and radical feminists lost their revolutionary edge in a "conservative slide

from oppositional to assimilationist politics" (Jagose 59). Although early gay

liberationists called for the eradication of sex and gender categories (Seidman), the more

assimilationist members gained numbers in rank and visibility and ushered in a more

legislation-oriented style of activism.

The Stonewall Riots of 1969 have been lauded as the "birth" of the gay rights

movement, but the cultural mythology of Stonewall has been critiqued by historians

(D'Emilio, *Sexual*; Piontek) and sociologists (Armstrong; Armstrong and Crage) for

ignoring the political efforts of the homophile[36] movements of the 1950s and '60s, and

"whitewashing" the beginnings of the gay rights movement by focusing primarily on

white gay men. The whitewashed version of Stonewall ignores "that a large number of

the patrons at the Stonewall Inn were Puerto Rican drag queens [and] that it may well

have been a lesbian, planting her foot in the chest of a police officer, who started the

chain of resistance during the first night of the riots" (Piontek 24). The influence of

transgender people on the gay rights movement is also overlooked. Most gay rights

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[36] The homophile movements of the 50s and 60s included the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of
Bilitis, the former including mostly gay men and the latter lesbian women (Piontek 11).

historical narratives exalt the Stonewall Riots while ignoring or remaining ignorant of the Compton's Cafeteria Riots, which occurred in San Francisco in 1966 (preceding Stonewall by three years), and were initiated by transgender people protesting their discrimination. As with Stonewall, the Compton's Cafeteria Riots brought together people at the margins of society, including sex workers, drag queens, street kids, and gays and lesbians, but a turn toward assimilation and homonormativity have all but erased these histories (Stryker).

The success of the civil rights movement did not go unnoticed by the emerging and more mainstream members of the gay liberation movement, who adopted an ethnic minority model of identity. This model stressed "community identity and cultural difference," rather than multiple differences and radical change (Jagose 59) and sought the granting of rights to a newly recognized and politically mobilized minority. This new mobilization represented a shift in focus to specific, rather than universal, social structures, and the effects of this shift are present in contemporary political debates and legislation concerning gay marriage and gay adoption, among others.

The collusion of multiple identities into the labels gay and lesbian "disenfranchised subjects" (Jagose 62). Racial minorities were marginalized by a group identity that pitted sexuality, in the binary sense, as the central organizing point for the movement, against peripheral, "secondary" characteristics like race and class. Exposing and critiquing the identity politics that informed this disenfranchisement has implications for all members of the queer community, especially those who are marginalized in the homogenizing process of uniting under the GLBTQ umbrella, despite its acronymic representation.

Alex narrates how his politics and perception of activism have changed as he shifted his identification from gay to queer. Now, his view of queer politics is in keeping with the pre-ethnic minority model of gay liberation that sought radical change rather than incremental legislative change:

> I don't know any queer people who are not activists.
> Well, and maybe this is just me,
> again my opinion completely,
> *but* from what I've noticed,
> when I identified more as gay,
> I was really interested in *just* gay issues,
> gay and lesbian issues.
> I was pro-marriage,
> I was total pro assimilation,
> and all of that.
> I didn't necessarily believe in the pluralism,
> which I now believe in.
>
> I think it's a generalization,
> but I think that queer people are more radical with their beliefs.
> And that directly translates into ideas about peace,
> or the war,
> or environmentalism.
> I would imagine that they are a lot more *radically* liberal.

Alex's queer politics are radical and pluralistic, and demonstrate the ways in which queer politics exceed issues of sexuality and connect to other social and activist issues. Alex, along with the other participants, narrates a commitment to intersectionality, not only in terms of identities, but in keeping with the coalitional activism Cohen calls for in her earlier cited article. The expanded view of a queer political consciousness—that is, expanded beyond an interrogation of heterosexism—exemplifies the political and academic goals of new queer studies discussed by Halberstam and others in Chapter Two.

Neither my participants nor I argue that queer is the antithesis of gay; however, my participants and I make sense of our queer identities at least partially in opposition to

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gay identities. Again, some participants have previously identified as gay, so they are

able to draw upon their first-hand experiences within gay communities, as Erik does in

the following narrative:

> To me, having queer politics is being the most inclusive.
> So any time you make a decision,
> or make a political move,
> the more *inclusive* you are,
> the more *queer* you are.
>
> My biggest political issues are
> racism,
> sexism,
> and homophobia.
> It's really hard for me to pick issues,
> I guess,
> because I just want to change them all at once.
>
> I feel like most gay men aren't activists.
> And, when I think about it,
> that's what my same situation was.
> When I *wasn't* an activist,
> I was *gay*.
> And when I became an activist,
> I became queer.
> I figure if I'm going to try to be an activist,
> then I want to be a queer activist.
> I know plenty of gay activists who are
> white,
> rich, and
> gay,
> and homophobia is their only issue.
> But, a queer activist deals with more than just their queer identity.
>
> I feel like queerness is a step forward in the social justice process.
> I feel like,
> for me, it's kind of like a *growth* in your own identity.
> I kind of feel like it's *hard* to be a really good activist,
> without being *queer* in some way.

Erik explicitly connects his personal queer politics to activism and social justice, and he

is reflexive about his role as an activist and, in keeping with the instability of queerness,

views his commitment to activism as ever evolving. Furthermore, Erik and Alex espouse perspectives that accounts for intersections of identities and the systems of privilege and disadvantage that come with those identities. Both participants' narratives also unknowingly answer Cohen's call for queer scholars and activists to acknowledge the potential of coalitional activism and answer Johnson's call to exceed the genealogy of queer theory mostly informed by white perspectives and white privilege.

Kelly makes activism intrapersonal in his narrative, citing the activism inherent in "maintaining" one's identity while occupying a marginalized societal position. Kelly, who has already questioned the mainstream gay rights movement, now makes a more pointed critique; juxtaposing queer activism with gay rights rhetoric, which he claims can be exclusionary and end up reinforcing oppression:

> I think activism is a part of queerness,
> because,
> I mean, I know it sounds kind of trite…
> but it seems like a political action to *just be* who *you* are,
> if you are queer.
> If you're doing *nothing* but *maintaining* who you are,
> with integrity,
> I feel like *that* in a lot of ways becomes a political action.
> But,
> ultimately,
> queerness seems to confront a lot of expectations
> that come from *within* gay and lesbian
> and *outside* the gay and lesbian community.
>
>
> Queer politics,
> for me,
> has this distinction from mainstream gay and lesbian politics.
> Why is the argument,
> "Well, we're just like you,"
> when, "*No*, my queer politics say I'm different than you."
>
> My gut reaction,

when I hear "gay rights" as a term, is very much thinking of people saying,
"Oh no, *that's* not a gay thing."
"We need to stay on track."
"We need to stay focused on the gay issue."
What I often see in that,
is a lot of racism,
and classism,
because there isn't an acknowledgement of pretty much anyone besides the,
"We're just like you upper middle class white folks."
who say,
"We're only going to push specific agenda items."
And I recognize that those issues are important to some people,
and also important to people I *work* with
and the people I *live* with
and the people I *love* with.
But,
generally,
they're not *our main* issues.

There's a bunch of political issues that are important to me as a queer person,
and they all feel interconnected.
Economic justice is one of the biggest pieces,
and doing anti-racism work.
Now,
identifying as male,
making sure that anti-sexism work is high up on my list is important,
and finding different ways to use privilege
to *buck* the system
a little bit is important.

I also think there are points of connection *between* social justice movements.
I *mean*, some of it is just really basic.
Like, in the immigrant rights movement,
there *are* queer immigrants,
and there *are* immigrants that are part of the queer community.
And so how are we working *together*,
and recognizing that the issues that people are facing,
as queer immigrants,
are different than straight immigrants,
or queer citizens?
And then with the reproductive justice movement—
How are we defining families?
What do *queer* families look like?
What do rights to your own body look like?
How does that overlap with trans identities,

and people who are deciding to have surgery
that might affect reproductive rights?

There's so much that is connected,
and so *many* people don't get it,
because it confuses everything,
and it, *queers*-everything-up.
And that's the thing that I think most of the queers in my life see—
the connections.
And most of the gays and lesbians have a very,
gay
rights
focus.

Queers need to *rally* together.
And from my experience too,
the people who identify as queer in my life,
who are doing political work,
aren't just doing the gay rights work.
People who are queer,
within these other movements,
are *pushing* these movements to have a queer analysis,
and pulling in people from other movements,
to really work together.

The "we're just like you" rhetorical strategy has been the assimilationist mantra of many leaders in the gay rights movement who are mostly white, middle class, gay men and lesbian women. Kelly does not negate the importance of legislative action for gay rights, instead he suggests the day-to-day material effects of marginalized identities that affect him, his community, and others are more pressing. The self-reflexivity inherent in Kelly's activism leads him to capitalize on his multiple identities by, for example, using his male privilege to engage in anti-sexism work with other men. He also illuminates how social and political issues such as immigration and reproductive rights intersect with the needs and interests queer people. My own activist work began within the assimilationist model. In my early twenties I was not thinking critically about my identities and

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intersectionality, and, as I mentioned earlier, the most visible gay rights organizations operate from this model. As I engaged more with queer theory, I began to reflexively critique the politics behind my activist work. An influential breakthrough occurred at an event I organized to commemorate the defeat of a discriminatory piece of legislation when one of the co-organizers suggested we move the "lesbians with strollers" to the front of the crowd so they would be nearer the news cameras. The event was held during an election year where gay rights initiatives were on the state ballot, and I am certain my co-organizer wanted publicly palpable, family oriented images of gays and lesbians showcased. Like Kelly, I do not oppose the marriage equality movement; however, in that moment I realized my intellect and labor could be more useful in other less assimilationist and myopic social causes. Since then, I have increased my engagement with anti-violence, anti-racist, and anti-sexist work, which led me to meet other queer minded people like Kelly. Our and others' focus on broad-based social justice issues acknowledges and prioritizes the everyday material consequences of marginalized identities. This brand of queer activism, which is informed by new queer studies, continues to address criticisms of queer theory's lacking accountability to materiality I outlined in Chapter Two. Occupying a marginalized identity means facing daily epistemic violence and at least the threat of physical violence. While some people have the privilege and the capital to become leaders in social movements, most people are not as fortunate because survival takes priority, and those people's voices are often excluded from these movements.

Moises calls the coalitional activism Kelly discusses "radical inclusivity." He also

relays the importance of internal reflexivity in building a critical queer consciousness,

which supplements outward manifestations of activism:

> Queer politics involves not only a superficial action,
> or this outward action,
> it's also this *internal* process,
> which to me is very political,
> because it means changing your whole political alignment,
> and thought process,
> and *really* calling into *question* a lot of things.
> And I think as a result of that *internal* process,
> the outward actions are benefited 10-fold.
>
> Queer politics, in my mind, calls into question
> a lot of the status quo stuff.
> You know, not *only* calling into question issues around sexual orientation,
> but calling into question issues around gender definitely, and
> calling into question issues around race,
> which is something that's been really salient in my identity.
> I think about queerness,
> in general,
> in an introspective way,
> *and* in the way that it continues outward really.
> Queerness really perpetuates what I would call,
> radical inclusiveness,
> or the pursuit of radical inclusiveness.
> And that to me *is* a political process.
> So, not just thinking about gay issues
> like gay marriage,
> and donating blood,
> but also thinking about how those issues
> are interconnected
> with other issues like,
> raising the minimum wage,
> and how queer people may be affected by that,
> and thinking about immigration and how queer people are affected by that.
> And-all-the-sudden, it's like,
> "Wait a second."
> "If I acknowledge these interconnections,
> does that mean I have to care about these things too?"
> And-all-the-sudden, it's like,
> "Yes I do."

And, hopefully that's a good thing,
hopefully that's awesome.
…But,
at the same time,
it's *overwhelming*.
And I guess that's what feels like radical inclusiveness—
acknowledging the intersections of all these social positions.
..And for me,
that's what my queer identity has done,
and what I've seen it do for a couple of other people as well.

Moises' identification as queer shifted his "whole political alignment" and moved him toward radical inclusivity. However, Moises' commitment to intersectionality and reflexivity create for him an "overwhelming" sense of accountability, which he and the other participants view as a necessary burden and as a rewarding challenge. Reflexively turning in on one's self and critically evaluating one's identities in relation to larger society is intersectional reflexivity in action, which I believe helps prevent queerness from becoming fixed and hence becoming static and exclusive. The instability of queerness as an avowed identity means acknowledging the messiness of living in a world that is inherently not queer. We must daily negotiate the dialectical tensions that exist within and between a queer identification and the practicalities of living in a material world where we, as mere humans, find ourselves falling into or even buying into ideologies our queer identities critique. Now, I turn to a more in depth discussion of the ways in which an idealized queer identity, that has largely been narrated to this point, contests *and* contributes to dominant and/or mainstream representations of gay male bodies and gay political discourses.

Balancing Tensions between Contestation and Complicity

The narratives presented so far address my first two research questions, which explore how queer men experience their identities, especially in relation to their bodies and personal politics in their day-to-day lives. The resulting stories and analysis paint a somewhat utopian, if not superior, view of queerness when compared to other identities and political perspectives. However, my participants and I constantly struggle with our own complicity in the aspects of society we are eager to critique. This struggle is reflected in the narratives below, which reemphasize the importance and value of intersectional reflexivity in lived experience and when researching and discussing identities. These narratives demonstrate that espousing a queer identity does not mean that people become fixed in their views of their bodies and politics. In fact, the narratives show a continuing effort to remain cognizant of and reflexive about the sometimes messy and contradictory aspects of queerness.

Body Positivity and the Subversion of Idealized Gay Male Bodies

Alex discusses his body in relation to discursive representations of what gay male bodies "should" be which circulate in popular culture. While Alex is now critical of gay male "body obsession" he narrates his past and ongoing struggles to fit into or reject those stereotypes:

> Looking at gay male culture,
> body *obsession* is one thing that I do not identify with at all,
> the obsession with the way they look.
> I look at that,
> and I'm like,
> "I don't fit into that group."
> "That is not me."
> "And not my preoccupation."
> "I don't really give a shit."

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You know what I'm saying?
So, that is one thing that definitely started pushing me,
towards thinking…
"Maybe I'm *not* a part of this community."
…That doesn't mean I didn't *try*.
I performed the gayest-thing-I-could-be.
You know,
I started tanning,
and I bleached my hair,
and I had my eyebrows all gussied up.
I used whitening strips on my teeth
and I had manicures,
and pedicures,
and was very *coiffed*.
I sort of *stuffed* myself into the latest fashion I could possibly find,
without making myself look *too* fat.
…And it was a big train wreck.
I think some guys can do that,
and I think it's awesome.
It just did not work for me at all.

Alex's attempts to mold himself to fit gay stereotypes through grooming and fashion, again, leads him to experience incongruency. Obviously, not all gay men have bleached hair and teeth or well manicured nails and eyebrows; however, as I outlined in Chapter One, images of gay men that most frequently circulate through popular culture, often represent gay men as icons of style and fashion, as in the makeover show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. For my participants and I, feeling like our bodies did not fit in with other gay male bodies partially motivated our avowal of a queer identity. Alex and other participants critique body stereotypes by moving toward body positivity; however, this new discursive space still exists in tension with, and relation to, other, more normative discourses regarding the body. In the following narrative, Alex demonstrates this tension as he looks back on his teenage years when he was thinner due to forced exercise and an eating disorder:

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Even though I look back,
and I was *really* pretty thin and fit,
I remember thinking of myself as just so grotesque *still*.
So, it's a constant battle, and I still have issues with the way that I look.
I'm still trying to come to terms with what I want my body to be.
And I have my moments of feeling fine,
and I have my moments of not.

Identifying as queer has helped take some of the body pressures off.
But they don't just *go away*.
I still deal with the pressures of gay male culture on a day-to-day basis.
I think my own obsession with my body is,
extraordinarily tied to the gay male obsession with their body.
…I'm not saying I resist it,
I *try* to resist it.
I think if I was a straight male,
I'd probably be okay with my body,
just because of the cultural difference.
The gay male obsession with having a perfect body drives me absolutely insane.

As Alex indicates in his narrative, identifying as queer does not mean all of our body issues disappear. Rather than a magic cure-all, a queer identity brings with it an ideology of body positivity that at least opens up a space where body diversity is validated, even though we struggle daily to embody such positivity.

Even within gay male culture, there are sub-cultures in which various body types are idealized and preferred. Erik experiences frustration when labeled a "twink" by other gay men, but experiences more validation within his queer community:

I think, in gay male culture, you've got your stereotypes.
You've got like your bodybuilder jock,
you got your twinky twink,
and you got your bears.
And *you have* to fit *one*.
And if you don't work out,
then you're a twink,
and you have-to-fit-in-the-twink category,
and you're always labeled this.
And I'm *always* labeled a twink.

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But, in the queer community,
I think all body types are just kind of accepted.
I've seen a lot of queer people are just *different*.
They don't fit a stereotype,
so they're just kind of like,
in the middle,
between stereotypes.

To me,
a lot of my queer friends are body positive.
And I think that's a big thing about the queer community.
Like, we truly try,
at least with people that I know who are queer,
and say they're queer,
to be accepting of all body images.
The gay community is not.
It's all about working out and looking good.
But, within the queer community,
it's okay to be big,
and you're still beautiful.
And I think that is what the whole idea of the queer community kind of is,
like just positive all around.

Erik mentions several sub-communities within the gay community that are explicitly corporeal. Twinks are usually young and thin with little body hair, and, as Erik pointed out earlier, may be feminized and thought of as passive and submissive. Bears are larger in terms of fat and/or muscles and usually have facial and body hair, while jocks are usually more masculine, muscled, and fit. While these different categories may ostensibly point toward a diversity of body images within the gay community, they are often sexualized or even fetishized in ways that make them exclusive rather than inclusive, which has the effect of factionalizing rather than uniting the gay community.

Extending Erik's discussion of body positivity and queerness, Moises notes that his espousal of an ideology of body positivity is not always realized within his own self-concept:

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I think having the ideology of
queer body-ness,
means being very body positive.
It's about loving one's body,
and telling people to love *their* bodies.
I feel that other people's bodies are beautiful,
and I think they're amazing things.
…But, I guess internally…
I haven't gone through that same process.
I'm good at explaining it to *other* people,
and being body positive for *other* people,
but for myself,
there's still a lot of ties,
to what I feel gay male body stereotypes and images are,
that *I* still deal with.

Dealing with an eating disorder myself,
that's really come to mind lately,
by really acknowledging that,
I have to go through a queer body image process,
to begin loving myself,
and loving my body,
for what it is,
and not trying to modify *my* body for *other* people.
…Not-to-say-that-I-think *my* body is perfect,
but knowing that the modification,
if I decide that there needs to be modifications,
…they need to be a decision,
made on my own,
for the purposes of myself,
not for the purposes of a societal pressure.
So, that's definitely a process that I still need to go through,
in an internal way,
and continue doing in an outward way,
because I don't want to stop doing that for other people.
But, it definitely needs to happen inside me as well.

Moises' commitment to body positivity is commendable, but his commitment is rife with

complexity as he negotiates his queer consciousness with the practicalities of living in the

material world and the contradictions within himself. Like Moises, I have found myself

preaching body positivity to others, even as I constantly feel the pressure to view my

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body as deficient in some way. Frequently, my gay male friends berate themselves by commenting on weight gain, body hair, wrinkles, and much more. Rather than participating, I subtly encourage them to think more positively. However, outside those interpersonal interactions, I find myself mentally rearranging my furniture to accommodate the Bowflex I have been persuaded to purchase after being drawn in by their sexy commercial. Even though I talk myself out of the purchase, I find myself viewing my body in comparison with the men on the infomercial in ways that lead to body consciousness or even body shame, rather than positivity.

Through the constructivist perspective of queer theory, we cannot fault Moises, myself, or anyone else for these moments of contradiction. Queer theory, like other poststructuralist theories, rejects the notion of a unified, self-contained, individual, and instead acknowledges that people exist in relation to larger society and dominant ideologies. As I discussed in Chapter One, there is agency within the process of interpellation and identification because, as Hall ("Who Needs") notes, no ideology is totalizing and there are always fissures and points of contestation. For example, Moises says he would like to modify his body only on his own accord and not based on societal pressure. While he does have agency to subvert societal pressure to a certain extent, any decision he makes regarding body modification is still made in relationship to dominant ideology, even if his action attempts to subvert dominant ideology. Sandoval's conceptualization of oppositional ideology, sums up this seeming contradiction. She states "the citizen-subject can…marshal the knowledge necessary to 'break with ideology' while at the same time *also* speaking in, and from within, ideology" (44). Even though these contradictions are frustrating, the ambiguity and messiness of queer

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identities affords my participants and I room to experience such contradiction, and

hopefully learn from it.

Kelly and Stanley's narratives more explicitly relate the ways in which they

struggle with body-essentializing discourses regarding their queer identities and their

identities as transgender men. Kelly experienced pressure to perform hegemonic

masculinity, but now queers masculinity by playing with non-normative gender

performances:

> I've seen assimilation play out in my personal life in different ways.
> And there are times,
> when I realize that I'm totally buying into it,
> without thinking about it.
> Then, I have had to take some steps back.
>
> I didn't change my name when I transitioned,
> and that feels fine.
> I keep getting *all kinds of* gendered greetings,
> on e-mail,
> and phone messages,
> from people who don't know me.
> So, that's always interesting.
> For a while, it freaked me out.
> But now, I'm secure enough in my own identity
> that it can just be this funny thing I can use,
> to try to challenge people's assumptions,
> instead of trying to move to a hyper masculine place.
>
> At the same time,
> before I was on testosterone,
> in order to associate myself with maleness,
> or to prove some male identity,
> I think there were certain things that I would sort of…
> *overdo*.
> Or, things that I *wouldn't* let myself do,
> because I didn't want to be associated with something
> that would detract from my *male identity*.
> But now,
> I'm playing with queer masculinity
> and I love it!

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I really like "faggy" as one of those reclaimed words,
just like queer.
I like that there's some irreverence to it.
There's some,
in-your-face-ness about it.
…I thought before coming out,
that I had to distance myself,
really clearly,
from femininity,
because I had role models in my life that did that.
And it took me a long time to realize that I
don't have to give that up.
But it's interesting to see,
that as I've-gotten-more-comfortable-with-my-identity,
and who I am,
and as I've been transitioning,
I've been able to move back,
to take on these feminine characteristics
that I've had for my whole life.
And so it's interesting to me,
that I'm behaving the exact same way,
and I'm moving in the exact same way,
but now it's being read in this really different way.
…And the best I can equate, in terms of language, is *faggy*.
Now I'm read as a *faggy man*.
…With not a whole lot changing,
the way people interact with me,
and the way that I'm read in public,
has changed.

At this point, I feel a lot more *freedom*,
in being able to sort of *create* the kind of masculinity I want to see.
There's a handful of male-assigned,
male-identified folks in my life,
who I *love* the way they do masculinity.
It's really amazing.
And it gives me something to aspire to,
because mainstream masculinity is not something I want to be.
…And I think that's what I struggled with,
as I was identifying as male.
How do I reject mainstream masculinity,
and at the same time,
keep struggling with people not recognizing *my* identity?

Even though Kelly occasionally gets referred to with female pronouns, the consciousness-raising he experienced as his gender identity changed, led him to feel more comfortable within his own queer performances of gender. While some transgender men change their names, Kelly kept his unisex name and, after his transition, feels comfortable recuperating some of the feminine characteristics from which he initially distanced himself. Kelly's reclamation of an effeminate male identity through the use of the label "faggy" demonstrates the ways in which queer identity also queers masculinity. But, at the same time Kelly comfortably and confidently queers masculinity, he desires to identify as male and have other people perceive him as male—a perception that others will make by comparing him to mainstream notions of how masculinity is and should be performed.

Stanley returns to a discussion of his body image, especially in relation to stereotypes of gay men as thin and fit. Similar to my own experiences, Stanley finds reassurance and validation of his body as he becomes more engaged with his queer community:

> I think there's a lot of pressure,
> among gay males,
> to work out six days a week,
> and to be thin,
> and toned,
> and have washboard abs.
> Plus, youth is prized above anything else,
> even if it's just looking real young.
> And that's a lot of pressure to put on people,
> because not everyone is going to fall into that.
>
> When I became involved in the queer community,
> it felt very,
> *positive* you know.
> It was nice to have some sort of validation of these emotions that I had,

and validating the idea that maybe,
being fat wasn't such a horrible,
awful fate.

While notions of body positivity have been present throughout Stanley's narrative,

specifically in his work with fat acceptance, working through body issues related to his

gender identity and expression has sometimes conflicted with the gender fluidity that is a

part of Stanley's view of queerness:

"Passing" has this inherent implication
that you're passing as something you're not.
And so if I say,
"I'm passing as male,"
that implies that I'm *not* male.
But, if I identify as male,
I'm male, *right*?
So, I shouldn't use the word "passing."
But there are lots of passing tips that I've been given in my life.
Things like,
"Make sure you have a very masculine haircut."
"Make sure you walk a certain way."
"Don't end your sentences on an up inflection instead of a down inflection,
because that's too feminine."
"Make sure your handwriting isn't too feminine."
Just a ton of stuff.
…These tips were actually sort of a hindrance,
when I was thinking about coming out as male.
I mean for a long time,
I identified as sort of…
poly-gendered,
or more male,
or male *and* female,
none-of-the-above,
all-of-the-above,
whatever.
And so I sort of
"othered"
myself from FTM people because I thought,
"Oh, I'm not like that."
"Look at those passing tips."
"I don't do any of those things except for the haircut."
And so it was a real obstacle.

And still,
now,
I don't feel 100% male.
I view a lot of my physical transitioning,
as something I had to *do*
to get what I need.
In other words,
I had to do these things to get people to treat me as male,
and use the correct pronouns for me.

So yeah,
passing is, in some ways,
very opposite to how I feel about being queer.
Passing is all about making other people comfortable enough
to do what you want them to do.
And you're meeting *other* people's expectations,
to give *them* the result that they want.
And so,
I feel pretty uncomfortable about it.
But then, at the same time,
when someone uses the wrong pronouns for me,
it feels like a
punch
in the
gut.
So, it's a means to an end,
but I'm not that comfortable with the means.

Stanley's narratives continue to illustrate the problematic intersection of queerness and maleness. The "passing" tips he was given by other trans men demonstrate a desire by some men to not only perform hegemonic masculinity, but to cultivate and encourage similar performances among others. We cannot essentialize transgender men into a monolithic community or ideological block, just as we cannot essentialize gays and lesbians; however, critical cultural analysis allows scholars to highlight the ways in which members of various groups may resincribe dominant and oppressive ideologies within their own marginalized communities. Stanley mentioned in an earlier narrative that he feels he has walked a "tightrope" his whole life, balancing between others'

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expectations and his own desires. A tightrope is a good metaphor for the dialectical tensions between queerness and other identities, but through the narratives I see the precariousness of the tightrope being balanced with the self-awareness that results from such liminal and uncertain perches. Stanley's reluctance to uncritically adopt performances of hegemonic masculinity allowed him to work through the contradictory feelings related to his desire to "pass" as male, while still critiquing the gender binary.

In this section, I have shown how critical thinking and the development of a queer consciousness allow my participants and I to self-reflexively examine and communicate our part in contributing to and contesting hegemonic discourses relating to self body image and representations of male bodies. In the following section, I explore more specifically the points of contestation between queer politics and gay politics and some of the frustrations that my participants feel as they attempt to put their queer politics into action.

Rights for Whom?: Queering Gay Rights and Righting Wronged Queers

While most of the narratives regarding queer bodies focus on contributing to and contesting essentialized views of attractiveness and masculinity, the following narratives focus on "gay rights" in comparison with broader-based social justice issues. My participants and I are not opposed to gay rights issues; however, we prioritize intersectionality and advocate for social change that extends beyond critiquing heteronormativity.

Without prompting from me, all my participants mentioned gay marriage and the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) when discussing the relationship between gay and queer politics. This emergent theme is not surprising, since the HRC is the nation's largest gay

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and lesbian "advocacy" organization and they actively and visibly devote resources

toward lobbying for gay marriage or some form of civil unions. In the following

narrative, Alex criticizes the mainstream gay rights movement's advocacy for

assimilating into unchanged oppressive systems like marriage:

> The HRC is completely provincial.
> *God*…
> I just have so many issues with that organization.
> On one hand,
> I support them,
> because they are the largest advocacy group,
> which is great.
> I'm not saying their work isn't important,
> I just don't feel like it's where *I* need to be.
> …But then again,
> in any revolution,
> or any kind of cultural change,
> there's always the two groups.
> There's the conservative group,
> and there's the radical group.
> And the radical group essentially,
> if you really want to get depressing about it,
> makes the other group look more conservative.
>
> The HRC doesn't necessarily function for me.
> Assimilation
> *is*
> death,
> and they want to assimilate.
> I don't understand.
> For god sakes,
> they're lobbying for marriage.
> You know, that's *not* where we need to be right now,
> I'm sorry.
> Trying to assimilate into like a
> racist,
> sexist ideology,
> is not my idea of where we need to be going right now.
> I think that the HRC *should* be going for
> abolishing marriage completely,
> personally,
> because marriage is a religious ceremony

and I respect that.

But, the government shouldn't be issuing religious certificates.

They should be issuing documents from the *government*.

So, I think we should abolish marriage,

and just have civil unions for all.

And then, if they want to get married and call it "marriage,"

and the church wants to give them their certificate,

that's the church's business,

not the government's business.

Gay marriage has been a hot topic in political and media discourses for at least the last decade, and my participants, beginning with Alex, start a theme of dissent in regards to what I would argue is the unspoken assumption that all gay people support gay marriage. Along with Alex, other participants critique the ways in which mainstream gay rights issues like marriage, adoption, blood donation, and military service largely argue from a "we're just like you" mentality that is based on assimilation. While my participants are organically experiencing the contradiction between wanting more inclusion for GLBTQ people and critiquing assimilation, queer scholars like Slagle have also written, in the personal voice, of their struggles:

> I have never fought for such dubious goals as gay marriage or gays in the military which are all about assimilating seamlessly into a largely unchanged, heteronormative, mainstream; what seems to be ignored is the fact that for many of us we can't easily fit in among such an unchanged system because the essential categories used to describe us are simply not accurate. Furthermore, many of us are simply not interested in merely being "tolerated" by the heteronormative mainstream; instead, we are interested in radical social changes in the ways that difference is perceived. For me, the real question is an ethical one: how can we continue to fight for simple inclusion and ask to be simply tolerated when the costs are so high for so many? ("Ferment" 325)

The passion in Slagle's words, along with his self-reflexivity, is echoed in my participants' narratives, and this passion highlights the human side of queerness. And, there is a personal side to queer politics that deals with the intimate lives of real people,

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which became especially salient for me during the 2006 Colorado election, when voters were faced with one piece of legislation defining marriage as a union between one man and one woman, and another granting domestic partnership benefits. I can only begin to describe the strong and conflicting emotions I had when I walked into my voting booth in November. Standing there, I paused and thought, "At this exact moment, and all day today, people all over my state are going to be standing in their voting booths, just as I am now, reading about my identity and my personal life on the ballot in front of them and then passing judgment on it." As a queer-identified person who would like to have the benefits of marriage but is suspicious and critical of that institution, like Slagle, I am left to ponder the practicalities of my queer politics and personal life.

Erik discusses the intersection of gay rights, queer politics, race, and gender, and how he, as a multi-racial effeminate male, finds difficulty identifying with mainstream gay and lesbian organizations and their leaders:

> For me,
> I guess the big thing that I've come to realize,
> is the racism within the gay community,
> because, if I was white,
> I'd be dating a lot more people.
> But I've come to notice that white guys,
> who I would say I'm just as cute as,
> get way more attention than I do.
> And the people I get attention from are always like
> "Oh you're so exotic."
> And so, I'm always put into this "brown boy" label.
> So for me,
> it's been really the biggest issue that I have with the gay community.
> Because it's like, gay marriage is nice,
> but I can't even date the same people that the person next to me can date,
> just because people view me differently.
> They're like,
> "You're femmie, I'm not going to get near you."
> "Oh you're brown, I'm not going to get near you."

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And they're really sexist and racist in the whole thing,
and *that's* what affects me daily…
and the gay community doesn't even talk about that.

For me,
it's different because I don't relate to the white rich gay men.
They're like,
"We want equal marriage,"
and I totally think equal marriage would be nice,
but there's more.
Like I need my *school* to be paid for,
I need my *housing* to be paid for.
I need equal rights in just being able to get financial stability.
I need equal rights just to be treated the same on the street.
I need equal rights for people to understand who I am,
as a multiracial person.
And so, until those are reached,
I really don't care about equal marriage,
because that doesn't deal with me
every day.
I'm not opposed to gay marriage,
but I think marriage is a Christian idea
that should be abolished from the government,
and I think civil unions
should be what the government uses to define a relationship.
And if you go in that direction,
straight people should get civil unions
and gay people should get civil unions.
And they should be the same thing that marriage is.

Erik's multiple layers of marginalization are evident as he discusses political priorities

that are much more related to his socio-economic status and racial identity than his

sexuality. When Erik feels the bodily and epistemic effects of racism and

commodification daily, it is not unreasonable to assume that gay marriage, as a political

issue, can wait. Moraga refers to the insularity some powerful white gay men feel as

"capitalist-unconsciousness." She also rightly notes that if white gay men acknowledge

class privilege and economic injustice, they may have to give up "whatever privileges

[they] have managed to squeeze out of this society by virtue of [their] gender, race, class,

or sexuality" (45). Erik's narrative echoes Moraga's sentiment that privilege may lead some to ignore widespread societal ills that do not affect them on a daily basis.

In terms of legislative politics, like Alex, Erik is not opposed to gay marriage, but references the separation of church and state and proposes the queer solution of abolishing marriage completely from the government's purview and granting civil unions to any couple, heterosexual, homosexual, or otherwise. My participants are not the first to critique the institution of marriage. Queers and feminists have a history of offering similar critiques, which are often discounted as "radical" or drowned out by the dollars of more mainstream organizations' messages. For example, Baird and Rosenbaum explicitly deride the sexism inherent in marriage, which Alex referenced in his narrative: "Traditional marriage is integral to the corrupt authoritarian structure of society…[and] the most important issue for gay and lesbian couples is whether or not they should 'sell out' to the enemy—the patriarchal culture—that seeks to oppress and eliminate them" (11). Here, the political tensions between assimilation and revolution are highlighted, and the rhetorical use of "elimination" makes relevant the queer activist slogan "assimilation equals death."

The literature on gay marriage includes various theoretical perspectives such as legal (Chambers; Duclos), civil rights (Eskridge; Wolfson), critical (Yep, Lovaas, and Elia, "Critical Appraisal") and performative (Dickinson); however, there is little mainstream attention given to differing opinions *within* GLBTQ communities as to whether or not some form of gay marriage is desirable. Here, questions regarding politics and identities that my participants have raised become especially germane. Is the diversity of opinion within the GLBTQ acronym at the table when important political

decisions are made? Or are monied, white, gay men and lesbian women given the discursive space in the media and within organizations to speak for the "others"? While the narratives shared so far imply queer perspectives are not present in policy making and that more privileged assimilationist leaders advocating for gay rights essentialize GLBTQ communities for the purpose of political strategy, my participants and I do not have access the motivations of gay rights leaders and can only speculate. I spend the remainder of this section weaving my participants' views on politics and marriage with the words of queer scholars who have eloquently engaged these issues.

Stanley notes that the gay rights movement seems to be led by people who represent "mainstream" America, which is white, able-bodied, and at least middle class:

> I think there's a segment in mainstream gay culture,
> that sort of *encourages* people to be
> single-issue voters.
> I'm thinking of the Human Rights Campaign who,
> in the past recommended voting for *all sorts* of people,
> just because they didn't hate gays,
> even though they could be off on every other issue.
> …I'm just more interested in intersectionality than that.
> I also think this sort of mainstream gay culture
> can be really exclusionary.
> You know, it really defaults to a middle class,
> or upper middle class,
> wealthy,
> white,
> able-bodied thing.

Stanley's intersectional view of politics and activism critiques the exclusivity of the gay rights movement and he also calls out the shallowness of the HRC's vetting and endorsement practices, which examine a politician's record on gay rights issues but ignore how they vote in regards to policies that affect other marginalized groups. For an organization that includes human rights in their name, I agree with my participants that

the HRC's practices seem to myopically focus on advocating for specific rights for specific humans. Stanley's thoughts regarding the HRC echo the frustrations present in Ferguson's discussion of the complexity of identity, marriage, and politics:

> Only those individuals buffered from racial, class, and gender oppression and who, but for their homosexual orientation are "virtually normal," could reasonably expect as narrow a reform as legal marriage to bring them almost complete ("ninety percent") equality and liberation. Women, men of color, and the economically disadvantaged (including many white gay men) need much broader and deeper social change to improve their lives. Thus, the disparate responses of white men, women, and gay men of color to the same-sex marriage movement is likely evidence that they are unequally affected by social power and, therefore, would benefit differently—if at all—from state recognition of their relationships. (61)

Here, we see the complex ways in which race, class, and gender intersect with sexual orientation and how queers of color and queers who are struggling in poverty are not often included in mainstream representations of what it means to be gay or lesbian. So, dominant narratives that inform assumptions about who is gay and who is not extend beyond the superficiality of personal grooming and sartorial taste. As Erik and Moises narrated earlier, their race, class, and ethnicity were not validated in within popular representations of gay men or in their interpersonal interactions with gay men. The monolithic ways in which race and sexuality are constructed leads to compartmentalized thinking and prohibits more intersectional views, which could facilitate coalitional activism (Stockdill).

Cohen, specifically examining the family as an assimilationist institution that has historically been used to discipline people of color as well as non-heterosexuals, reiterates how heteronormativity affects most negatively those outside the mainstream, particularly people of color and people in poverty. Citing a queer activist newsletter,

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Cohen illuminates the disdain that many activist queers have for the assimilationist gay rights movement:

> Fuck the heterosexual, nuclear family. Let's make families which promote sexual choices and liberation rather than sexual oppression. We must learn from the legacy of resistance that is ours: a legacy which shows that empowerment comes through grassroots activism, not mainstream politics, a legacy which shows that real change occurs when we are inclusive, not exclusive. (30)

The cited newsletter clearly advocates in favor of grassroots activism as opposed to legislation. In contrast, the HRC, the largest gay rights group in the United States, devotes its resources toward lobbying and not grassroots organizing. Judith Butler (*Undoing*) takes up a critique of mainstream gay rights organizations like the HRC and calls for the opening up of kinship ties to models beyond those based on heterosexist ideology, stating marriage should not be "the exclusive way in which both sexuality and kinship are organized" (5). Queer discourses that critique marriage and family are *not* included in ongoing conversations regarding politics, identity, and gay marriage, as a mainstreamed gay agenda combine with family values rhetoric to create discursive closure.

While purposefully separating discussions of the body and politics was useful for organizing my analysis, it is clear at this point that bodies are always political. Drawing on Judith Butler's concept of *intelligibility*, we can see how queer bodies are rendered unintelligible in dominant society because they do not fit (*Undoing*). By adopting assimilationist rhetoric, some gay and lesbian bodies become intelligible if society buys into the "we're just like you" argument, while transgender bodies and other less privileged queer bodies remain unintelligible and remain at the margins. However, Judith Butler ("Doing") acknowledges that unintelligible identities are not "without value to

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politics" because engaging the "limits of intelligibility [offers] a perspective on the

variable ways in which norms circumscribe the human" (635). This type of agentic

unintelligibility is present in the narratives of my participants, which avoid discursive

closure and call for more grassroots, coalitional activism and a more prominent place for

queer voices.

Kelly, who works as a community organizer, says:

I think a lot of the barriers preventing groups from working together
revolves around hierarchies of oppression.
The way we're taught to deal with identities,
is to identify with people like us,
and to keep some distance from people who are not like us.
And so there's also a lot of pressure on people,
who are dealing with multiple forms of oppression,
to *prioritize* which identity
is going to be *more* important
at any one given moment.
And so,
for a lot of people,
who are primarily dealing with *one* form of oppression,
it's hard for them to think outside of that box.
And so I think,
as activists,
we get very consumed in the work we are doing,
and *especially*,
if it's a single-issue-thing,
it's hard to break out of that,
because it makes our job so much harder.
If you can just focus on this one thing and say,
"I'm just going to fix this one little piece,"
then it feels more manageable.
But ultimately,
my perspective is you can't pick that one little piece,
without looking at the *bigger picture*.
And it's hard to get people to step outside of that,
because it really challenges people's assumptions
about what is *wrong* and what is *right* with the world.
And it seems like there needs to be some sort of,
shattering of reality,
or concepts of reality

before getting to a place of multi-issue organizing.

Especially if people have been doing this for 20 years,
breaking that construct down could be life-changing.

Kelly's reflections on social justice and activism are encouraging and discouraging at the same time. How realistic is it to expect people to choose a path toward activism that is potentially "shattering?" I have personally felt the challenges of trying to bring a queer perspective into conversations ranging from academic conference presentations, to public dialogues regarding gay rights, to interpersonal conversations with my friends, as my attempts are often met with skepticism at best and hostility at worst. My participants and I have shared the difficulty we have trying to reconcile our own contradictions in terms of how we deploy queer critiques but sometimes fail to embody the queerness we seek to grow in others. At times it seems futile to try to persuade others to open their minds and bodies to queerness when it is so difficult for those of us who have been queer-identified for years to do the same. However, discouragement does not keep us from imagining a queer future, which Erik describes in the following narrative:

A queer world would be *dramaticall*y different.
It would not look the same at *all*.
Ideas of social change would *have* to be put in place.
Capitalism would *die*.
Country boundaries would be removed,
and a lot of what we have today would be destroyed or changed.
It would look like something from a sci-fi movie,
where it's like a utopian planet that has moved beyond any issue.
There would be a feeling of unity.
We wouldn't have money anymore,
and everyone would just work for the common good.
And rather than trying to highlight differences,
we would accept each other's differences,
and use them as positive additions to society.
Our current society wouldn't work at all,
but *that's* what a queer future would look like.

Perhaps as society becomes more progressive and inclusive, it will also become more socially just. While the practicalities of such a radical social change may seem overwhelming, my participants' narratives articulate an existing queer consciousness, which I hope will continue to spread.

The process of collecting and analyzing the narratives presented in this chapter was personally transformative. I humbly thank my participants for lending their narratives to me and view them as co-authors of this chapter. The openness my participants exhibited was supplemented by critical self-reflexivity, passion, and sophistication that fulfilled my longing to communicate with other queer men. However, I now long to see a larger and more visible queer community that may create safe spaces for other queer people who feel marginalized and isolated. I also wish the safety and self-confidence my participants and I feel when in the company of other queer people could be more prolonged and less fleeting. The conclusions to which I now turn offer inspiration rather than resolution; however, they gesture toward the emancipatory potential of queer consciousness when deployed in intersectional, reflexive, and coalitional ways.

Queer Consciousness, Intersectional Reflexivity, and Coalitional Activism

In this chapter, I sought to explore how queerness is experienced in the day-to-day lives of queer men by intersecting queer theory with intersubjective research methods. I explored how queer men's views of their bodies and personal politics intersect with other cultural and social identities, and how embodied queerness critiques and reproduces mainstream representations of gay male bodies and how gay rights issues are represented

in political discourses. I also sought to evaluate the ways in which intersectional reflexivity, as a paramethodological commitment, manifested in my research practices and in the resulting narratives. Throughout the analysis, I have pointed out intersectional reflexivity that was inherent within my participants' narratives. The complex understanding and awareness of intersectionality that my participants exhibited led me to theorize the notion of a queer consciousness, to which I alluded throughout the analysis. Below, I articulate the interconnections among queer consciousness, intersectional reflexivity, and coalitional activism.

As my participants and I have explained, queer identities are not solely related to sexual orientation, which is why I avoid using *queer* as an umbrella term for identities that are based on sexual orientations, such as gay, lesbian, and bisexual. Same-sex sexual activity, while potentially queer, does not necessarily create a queer consciousness. As my participants chart their journeys toward identifying as queer, they recount incongruency between and within identities, which I argue creates queer consciousness. Further, I argue that explicitly avowing a queer identity is more purposeful and self-selecting than avowing a gay identity. Some participants note they chose, at some point, to identify as gay because they were unaware of other options. So, even though avowing a gay identity is also self-selective, it does not necessarily require the consciousness-raising that espousing a queer identity does. One can "learn" how to be gay or what it means to be gay from media and popular culture. While these ways of learning may be based on stereotypes, they are still culturally prevalent pedagogical touchstones. As I outlined in Chapter One, gay identities have become commercialized and commodified in such a way that it becomes a ready-for-purchase identity. However, as Moises noted

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earlier, queer identities do not come with ready-made instructions or definitions. The decision to identity as queer, as my participants have noted, does not come without problems. I, along with some of my participants, experienced a backlash from friends and/or family when we chose to explicitly identify as queer instead of gay. This re-identification from gay to queer meant critiquing and separating ourselves politically from an identity we once avowed, a step that included self-reflexivity and resulted in consciousness-raising.

As I noted earlier, queer consciousness is not new. The early gay liberation movement was queer in its radical desire to completely question and deconstruct large social formations such as marriage, gender, and sexuality. While these radical voices were muted by more monied and more privileged gays and lesbians seeking legislative rather than revolutionary action, queer activism again emerged in the '80s and '90s as a result of AIDS. But what is spurring a new wave of queer consciousness my participants and I exhibit and have witnessed in other contexts? From talking with my participants and analyzing their narratives, I believe the most recent round of queer visibility is linked with the transgender rights movement. My participants and I all identify as transgender or as trans allies, and we have drawn inspiration from the gender theory, feminist theory, and queer theory that inform trans activism. Furthermore, being a part of the trans rights movement forces those involved to think more critically about their gender in relation to societal norms, and to question the mainstream gay and lesbian movement that has actively contributed to trans-phobia through silence, exclusion, or outright discrimination. In this case, I argue that my participants' critical evaluation of their gender identity, just

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as they critically evaluated their gay identity, is a germinal seed for developing queer consciousness.

Other scholars have used the term *queer consciousness*, but have problematically left *queer* unconceptualized. While Jung and Smith's definition of queer consciousness denotes a politicized or politically conscious identity, their focus is on heterosexism, while other –isms go unmentioned: "Queer consciousness represents a move toward reappropriation of the distinctive character of being a gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender person. It refuses to accept heterosexist norms for interpreting sexuality and often works from a more militant stance over against the heterocentric majority culture" (7-8). While I definitely agree with their conceptualization of queer consciousness as radical and as opposed to heterosexism, the type of queer consciousness my participants embody and describe is more intersectional, as it includes views on sexism, racism, and classism, among others. Furthermore, as my participants eloquently describe in their narratives, they do not privilege their experience of heterosexism over race, class, or gender issues.

Jung and Smith also state a queer consciousness reappropriates the character of being a sexual minority in relation to heteronormative culture, but I push further to argue that queer consciousness also reappropriates what it means to be a sexual minority from homonormative culture—that is, an assimilated view of what it means to be a gay person. In short, queer consciousness ruptures the restrictive consciousness that reinforces heteronormativity *and* homonormativity and helps to decolonize the mind from hegemonic representations of culture, the body, and politics.

While my theorization of queer consciousness emerged from within the framework of my dissertation project, notions of a critical consciousness that privilege intersectionality are not new. Queer ways of thinking have existed and continue to exist in other political, social, and cultural contexts. As noted earlier, Anzaldúa's theorization of the "new mestiza" is inherently queer, intersectional, and reflexive. Also, hooks (*Talking Back*) argues that critical consciousness must be intersectional. She cites the move in feminist circles to raise consciousness through naming one's oppressor, and argues that this type of consciousness-raising is not critical. hooks states that not acknowledging the "complexity of structures of domination could easily lead to "misnaming" one's oppressor (32). She continues: "This often happens in a feminist context when race and/or class are not seen as factors determining the social construction of one's gendered reality and most importantly, the extent to which one will suffer exploitation and domination" (32). Social movement theorist Aldon D. Morris conceptualizes this limited view of oppression as "partial oppositional consciousness," which challenges one form of inequality while promoting other inequalities (Stockdill 19).

Partial oppositional consciousness is illustrated by the political agendas of gay and lesbian rights movement leaders who focus on heterosexism, while ignoring their complicity in sexism, classism, and racism. This brand of oppositional consciousness is not uncommon and, as Aldon Morris notes, "is usually fashioned to confront a particular enemy and advance a limited set of interests. Rarely does a dominant group's overall ruling position come under total attack" (364). By examining different modes of consciousness through a critical lens of intersectionality, we can expose how hegemonic

consciousness, which is sustained by socializing institutions and dominant ideologies, and oppositional consciousness, which is a "set of insurgent ideas…developed by an oppressed group," are never totalizing (A. Morris 363). The complexity created by competing ideologies, intersecting identities, and the materiality of lived experience creates imperfect, messy, and queer consciousnesses. The imperfection of critical consciousnesses is clear in Stockdill's claim that social change is inhibited by hegemonic consciousness *and* the internalization of hegemonic practices by oppressed groups. In short, oppressed groups exhibit aspects of hegemonic consciousness even as they strive to be oppositional. For example, my participants' narratives criticize the oppressive practices they experienced within gay male culture, while acknowledging that they occasionally buy into those oppressive practices. However, the queer consciousness of my participants moves beyond partial oppositional consciousness toward what Stockdill terms "multidimensional oppositional consciousness," which he states "emphasizes the importance of challenging multiple, interlocking oppressions" (33).

What I find most promising in Stockdill's concept, multidimensional oppositional consciousness, is its grounding in the practicalities of lived experience. He disclaims that the concept is best viewed "as an ideological or strategic goal rather than a completely inclusive ideology…[because] few, if any, groups will be able to be inclusive of *every* inequality" (33). My participants exercise this type of consciousness by acknowledging their shortcomings in terms of perfectly embodying opposition and queerness, and then taking action steps to mitigate their perpetuation of oppression by critiquing their privilege, educating others about privilege, and seeking political alliances across identities. While Stockdill does not use queer theory in his book, his conceptualization of

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a multidimensional oppositional consciousness is instructive and compatible with my theorization of queer consciousness, because both consciousnesses help ameliorate, but not solve, the negative discursive and material effects of marginalization and incongruency. Specifically, as evidenced in my participants' narratives, queer consciousness helps those who contest societal and cultural norms better understand their identity struggles by embracing ambiguity and creating spaces for agency within liminal, unfixed discursive and material spaces.

While queer consciousness intersects with other theories of critical oppositional consciousness, the intersectional reflexivity inherent in my participants' narratives also connects to theories of belonging and alliance, which illuminate possibilities for coalitional activism. My participants' ongoing experiences of incongruency with various cultural and social identities and the consciousness-raising that resulted relates to Rowe's (*Power Lines*) scholarship on feminist alliances, which draws on and extends Segrest's work on "belonging." Rowe (*Power Lines*) describes a processual development of self and consciousness, which I found in my participants' narratives:

> the subject does not arrive at its becoming once and for all through its stagnant signification within a particular moment in time, although salient moments may stand out as particularly punctuated. Rather, the subject arrives again and again to her own becoming through a series of transitions—across time and space, communities and contexts—throughout the course of her life. She may be known, then, not through her fixity within logics of the mythic "I," but rather by virtue of her own variation. (27)

Rowe's eloquent description captures the essence of my participants' experiences and my own rendering of the narratives above. While I asked my participants to recount salient moments regarding their queer identities, I consciously avoided thinking of these narratives as linear and final, which is an academic convention of Western ways of

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thinking and writing (Minh-ha). Presenting linear narratives as finite and discrete

signifiers of the meaning of queer identity would go against conceptualizations of queer

as unstable and fluctuating, and would be incongruent with the politics of the

performance paradigm and performative writing I outlined earlier. Rather, I present the

narratives in a way that illustrates the transformative potential of a queer consciousness,

which privileges intersectional reflexivity and critiques normative, unreflexive ways of

thinking about self, communities, politics, identities, and cultures.

Rowe highlights the lack of reflexivity in most people's day-to-day lives when

she states: "The meaning of self is never individual, but a shifting set of relations that we

move in and out of, often without reflection" ("Be Longing" 16). While shifting, moving,

and, as I argue, incongruency, are important components of queer consciousness,

critically minded scholars and citizens must go further, toward self-reflexivity that is

implicative. By addressing the following two questions, posed by hooks ("Choosing"),

we can move toward intersectional reflexivity for the sake of social justice.

> Within complex and ever shifting realms of power relations do we position
> ourselves on the side of colonising mentality? Or do we continue to stand in
> political resistance with the oppressed, ready to offer our ways of seeing and
> theorising, of making culture toward that revolutionary effort which seeks to
> create space where there is unlimited access to the pleasure and power of
> knowing, where transformation is possible? (15).

hooks echoes Alcoff's ("Problem") reminder to critically question political accountability

and positionality. These questions are tough, and critical scholars must continue to

grapple with their answers through oftentimes uncomfortable self-reflexivity in order to

remain critical and avoid becoming complacent, fixed, and complicit. This sentiment is

echoed by Fassett and Warren who state:

> Being a critical scholar is not about escaping, it is not about being or feeling better, and it is certainly not about doing easy research. Being a critical scholar is about always being accountable for not only what you intend, but what kinds of effects you put in motion. It is about holding yourself responsible even when privilege tells you are not, about listening to others even though you feel you are entitled to speak. (88)

I argue that intersectional reflexivity, as a paramethodological commitment, helps scholars answer the questions raised by hooks and heed Fassett and Warren's call in ways that not only produce more ethically sound and accountable research, but also leads us toward what Rowe calls a "politics of relation" ("Be Longing" 16), which brings together my discussions so far regarding queer consciousness, intersectional reflexivity, and coalitional activism.

My participants' narratives demonstrate a commitment to intersectionality not just in terms of the politics of identities, but also in terms of politics and activism, which begins to address Cohen's call for an expansion of queer politics beyond critiques of heteronormativity in favor of more coalitional politics. Rowe makes Cohen's call more interpersonal when she states that a politics of location "moves theories of locating the subject to a relational notion of the subject. It moves a politics of location from the individual to a coalitional notion of the subject" ("Be Longing" 16). After analyzing my participants' narratives, I argue the move from an individual to a coalitional view of the subject is facilitated through the development of queer consciousness, which Alex demonstrates in the following narrative:

> My queer perspective also includes critiques of
> racism and sexism,
> and I think this perspective holds true a lot more in the queer community
> than it would in other communities.
> But, this doesn't mean that I am not racist at some points,
> because I've *grown up* in *this culture*,

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I've been socially indoctrinated.
I recognize that.
I *recognize* that I am racist.
I *recognize* that I probably have elements of misogyny in my thought process.
But the difference is,
I'm able to recognize that,
and hopefully able to correct it.

Through Alex's self-implication, he not only acknowledges his privilege, but he also locates himself within a productive oppositional framework, accessed through his queer consciousness, which moves him from guilt regarding his privilege toward the action-oriented step of correcting his perpetuation of racism and sexism. Alex narrates a move from individual concerns to social justice, community-oriented goals, and political alliances, which is a first step in moving toward coalitional activism, and a step that critiques the individualism that so heavily influences and colonizes the imaginary within modernity.

Rowe calls for a shift from "I," which "announces 'I am…' to a sense of 'self' that is radically inclined toward others, toward the communities to which we belong, with whom we long to be, and to whom we feel accountable" ("Be Longing" 18). This means critically minded people, scholars and citizens, must move beyond an individualized location, expanding their accountability from self, to others *and* self. However, such a move may be problematic if self-reflexivity is not critically intersectional, as Rowe illustrates in her analysis of Adrienne Rich, in which she critiques Rich's work and her claim to have a "view from below." Rowe's critique focuses on Rich's employment of an individualized location, for example, when Rich refers to herself as "Enlightened White Feminist" (19). Returning to my discussion of the genealogy of intersectionality from Chapter Three, I argue Rich's demonstration of intersectionality is more in keeping with

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the multi-cultural additive model than the rigorous intersectionality informed by feminists of color. While Rich acknowledges her identities, she does not critically acknowledge the systems of privilege *and* disadvantage that come with each. Rowe's conclusions similarly highlight Rich's "failure to interrogate the relational conditions out of which her seeing arises, [which] undercuts the coalitional affectivity of her self-reflexive gesture" (19). Rowe's example and analysis highlights my earlier argument that intersectionality and reflexivity are employed in different ways, creating different results, which led to my desire to more thoroughly conceptualize their interrelatedness in order to more effectively demonstrate their critical potential. Rich's failure to more rigorously account for her multiple identities ended up reinforcing her privilege as well as oppressive notions of individualism that have historically perpetuated exclusion of others. As Rowe (*Power Lines*) notes, "We tend to overlook the ways that power is transmitted through our affective ties. Whom we love, the communities that we live in, whom we expend our emotional energies building ties with—these connections are all functions of power" (26). In this sense, being a feminist queer activist or an advocate for anti-racism are not isolated identities; instead, they are always relational in that our choices and actions affect others, and influence the effectivity and consequences of our political alliances.

While Rowe's ("Be Longing") analysis of Rich's scholarship is instructive, my participants organically narrate their predisposition toward a politics of location that is intersectional *and* self-reflexive, which Erik demonstrates in the following:

> Well,
> I think people who are in a position of privilege
> don't understand what it's like to be in a position of oppression.
> So, if you're gay,
> you can understand what it's like to be oppressed by heterosexism,

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but you don't understand what it's like to be oppressed as a person of color.

I think it's important for gay people to think about *their* privilege.
Because, I feel that if you're gay,
and that's your only minority status,
then you know you may not be able to serve in the military,
and you may not be able to get married,
but, *overall*, it doesn't affect your daily life in a negative way.
For most rich white gay people,
marriage is just another thing to have.
You *still* have *money*,
and you're still going to be *fed*,
and you're still going to have a *house*.

Erik again points out the differences between daily oppression for those who are always

already marked as others and oppression for those who occupy spaces of privilege, which

may insulate them from the daily epistemic and physical violence imposed on others.

Acknowledging one's privilege and more critically excavating one's social location, as

Erik and the other participants do, may result in critical agency (Rowe, "Be Longing"

18), which empowers and moves one from individualism toward coalitional activism and

mutual accountability (23). Such a move is illustrated in my participants' voiced

commitment to coalitional activism. For example, instead of focusing on legislative

activism that may grant a more privileged group the right to adopt children, my

participants' political commitments engage larger social issues. I argue their disposition

toward coalitional activism results from their acknowledgement of "power and

privilege," which then allows them to "correct" themselves "from a marginal vantage

point" (20).

Rowe (*Power Lines*) claims self-correction and self-realization become a

possibility as the "subject [engages] in a continual process of placing herself at the edge

of her self and leaning and tipping toward the others to whom she belongs, or with whom

she longs to be" (26). The process of self-correction demands self-reflexivity. Like Alex,

I acknowledge my white privilege, and then capitalize on my privilege in order to

intervene in the everyday ways in which my whiteness reinforces white supremacy. My

participants and I all work to undercut the authority to which our privileges entitle us,

which enhances our potential to be coalitional activists (21). From the narratives above,

we see that Kelly brings his white male privilege into his work on anti-violence, Moises

acknowledges his male privilege in his work on sexual assault awareness and prevention,

I have led community workshops, dialogues, and performances on intersecting privileges,

and in the following narrative, Stanley acknowledges the challenges and rewards of

acknowledging privilege:

> I have found that queer people,
> or the ones that I know,
> seem to be more interested in addressing *intersecting* identities,
> and how that fits with their queerness.
> They seem to be more willing to do,
> sort of,
> internal evaluations of the types of privilege that they have,
> and how that affects how they interact with other people.
>
> I try to confront my own privilege all the time.
> I have a lot of privilege, especially white privilege.
> …I don't have any disabilities at the moment, and
> I'm in a job where I make more money than my parents did.
> The more frequently I pass as male,
> the more I have to deal with male privilege,
> though I-haven't-yet-figured-out how to address that.
> But, at least acknowledging I have some,
> puts me ahead of a number of trans guys out there.
>
> I was struggling with white privilege in college,
> right before I came out as queer.
> I think struggling with privilege is a part of being queer.
> You're always going to have privilege over someone,
> that's just the way it goes.
> So, I think it's good to acknowledge

how it affects your interaction with the rest of the world,
and how you think about the rest of the world.

Through analyzing my participants' narratives, I have developed an answer to Rowe's question: How do people with privileged positionalities come to a view from below? The above narratives recount ongoing experiences of incongruency that led my participants to critically and reflexively question the politics of belonging and exclusion. What I conceptualize as incongruency is similar to Rowe's theorization of "differential belonging" (*Power Lines* 39), which draws on Sandoval's theory of differential consciousness (58). Rowe states that differential consciousness emerges at "points of contact among converging and competing intensities, junctures, and crises [which forge] a subject of belonging capable of radical, and largely untapped, modes of resistance" (*Power Lines* 40). I argue that the consciousness-raising resulting from my participants' and my own experiences of incongruency germinated into the development of a queer consciousness that is inherently critical, reflexive, and intersectional. My argument is validated in Rowe's finding that "in differential belonging, coalitional subjects recognize the lessons that come from moving among these various modes of belonging" (41). While my participants' embodiment of intersectional reflexivity exemplifies the politics informing accountable critical cultural studies research, I am also committed to demonstrating intersectional reflexivity within my research process and in my final scholarly product.

I cannot just demand reflexivity from my participants; I must also demonstrate reflexivity by unpacking and including the desires that drive me to produce certain texts (Rowe, "Be Longing" 19). This type of academic self-reflexivity starts before research

begins, through introspection, which I have largely done through the use of auto-methods like autoethnography and personal narrative. I have also made my self-reflexivity public through performance in various venues, which allows me to get feedback and criticism that can further inform my own process of self-reflexivity. In order to locate myself within this research, I have included personal narratives in the first and last chapters that set-up and debrief my entrance and exit in this research process. As noted earlier in this chapter, the politics behind my research methodology also made the process of collecting narratives dialogic in that my participants and I co-constructed the narratives through mutual disclosure, as I shared my own stories and experiences with them during our meetings. Throughout my analysis I have included my motivations for asking particular questions and included personal experiences with my body, my politics, and the internal struggles I have in balancing my queerness with the practicalities of living in a discursive and material world where normative ideologies and discourses tempt and sometimes seduce me away from queerness. As I now turn to the final chapter, I am invigorated by the interconnections among queer consciousness, intersectional reflexivity, and coalitional activism, which will hopefully move us as scholars, activists, and citizens toward a more queer future.

CHAPTER FIVE

TOWARD A QUEER FUTURE: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS,

LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This dissertation project generally emerged as part of my ongoing journey toward

better understanding my cultures and identities, and specifically took shape as I

investigated the lack of intersubjective research in Human Communication Studies that

utilized queer theory and/or queer perspectives. While queer scholars have historicized

homosexuality, focused on how the body has been disciplined, critiqued identity politics,

and questioned assimilationist rhetoric, they have not often expanded their scope to

triangulate queer theorizations with the lived experience of queer-identified people. I

entered this project with an overarching question: How do queer men experience their

identities in their day-to-day lives? In attempting to answer this question, I realized that

applying queer theory to research on identity using intersubjective methods becomes

problematic due to points of epistemological contestation.

I bridged the seemingly disparate terrain between queer theory and identity by

problematizing queer theory's implications of identities as suspicious and specious

artifacts of the Enlightenment, that essentialize the self as subject, by turning to theories

of identity informed by scholars of color (Alcoff, *Visible*; Anzaldúa; Moraga; Sanchez)

and the performance paradigm (Conquergood; Johnson, "Quare"; Langellier). By

viewing identities as discursively created narratives that are processual rather than fixed,

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and acknowledging the material effects of identities on the bodies and minds of marginalized people and groups, I ameliorate queer theory's suspicion of identity enough to engage in intersubjective research and further articulate a place for scholars in the already "queer"[37] discipline of Communication to actively contribute to metatheoretical and metamethodological conversations regarding queer theory and participant-based research.

By engaging in this research, I also address two critiques of queer theory: queer theory's unbalanced focus on the discursive over the material; and queer theory's lacking commitment to, and demonstration of, critical and reflexive intersectionality. While I elaborate on the relevance of my research to these critiques in the forthcoming conclusions, scholars in what Manalansan calls "new queer studies," Halberstam calls "the new moment of queer studies," and Yep (*GLBTQ*) calls "second generation queer theory" also begin to address these critiques.

As I began this project, I was uncertain if other queer men would have similar experiences to mine, especially in terms of their motivations for explicitly identifying as queer. I also expected it would be difficult to co-construct personal narratives that demonstrated intersectionality and reflexivity; however, the eloquence and complexity of my participants' personal narratives exceeded my expectations, creating rich texts through which to examine queerness in lived experience.

In the remainder of this chapter, I offer conclusions related to each of the research questions I posed in Chapter Two, discuss implications of this research including the heuristic value of queer theory in Human Communication Studies and better supporting

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[37] As I cited earlier, Slagle ("Testing") states Communication is a queer discipline because includes both the humanities and social sciences.

queer men, address limitations of this project and avenues for future research, and share personal ruminations on my investment in critical cultural research.

Conclusions

Queer theory's critiques of mainstream discourses regarding sexuality provide powerful theoretical tools for deconstruction, but I questioned how people who claim a queer identity experience these discourses. Does queerness, in lived experience, subvert mainstream discourses? In addressing this question, I found that queerness in lived experience is compatible with queer theory in that queer identities subvert and deconstruct dominant ideologies, which highlights practicalities of queer theory beyond textual analysis. Demonstrating the practicalities of queer theory in lived experience is important because some scholars have questioned whether or not such practicalities exist (Gamson, "Reflections"; R. Smith). However, queerness, in lived experience, falls short of queer theory's revolutionary mandate at the juncture of discourse (abstract theory) and materiality (human experience). While *queer* as a theoretical term may be perfectly anti-essentialist and anti-assimilationist, it is impossible for human beings to completely embody such conceptual flawlessness; so, this project has tempered an over-idealistic view of queer theory with the stories of real queer people doing the best they can to embody queerness.

I found that my participants all came to a queer identification through a series of experiences of incongruency with other identities such as heterosexual, bisexual, and gay. I also found that the feelings of incongruency largely focused on issues of the body and politics. My participants recounted stories of dealing with body shame in relation to the narrow representations of what gay male bodies "should" look like. They also articulated

political commitments that exceed a gay rights focus on legislative activism in favor of broader-based social justice activism.

As my participants experienced incongruency, their critical reflexivity contributed to a developing queer consciousness, which I argue facilitates their commitments to intersectionality and coalitional activism. My participants' rich personal narratives enable me to theorize the importance of queer consciousness as a lens through which these queer men view themselves and the world. Through the research process, which was inspired by my own commitments to intersectional reflexivity, dialogue, and co-performance, my participants and I created a discursive and material space of possibility where I could explore how queer identities contests heteronormativity as well as homonormative representations of gay male bodies and gay rights issues in political discourses.

The first research question asked: How do queer men experience their identities in their day-to-day lives? The narrative themes relevant to this question demonstrate that the participants view their identities in intersectional ways, have had similar journeys through various identities before identifying as queer, experience problematics within the intersection of queerness and maleness, and find salient the political implications of race, ethnicity, and privilege within intersecting identities. The lens of intersectionality allows for the critical unpacking of multiple identities and exposes the ways in which oppressive ideologies of racism, classism, and sexism, among others, infiltrate cultures and identities. By specifically soliciting personal narratives about moments when intersections of identities became salient, my participants and I were able to illuminate and critique the ideological work of suturing together the inevitable ruptures that occur when power attempts to fix and essentialize the complexity of multiple identities. By

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privileging intersectional reflexivity throughout the research process, I was also able to address criticisms of queer theory's lack of intersectionality; a lack that was at least partially maintained by queer scholars who ignored race, class, and gender—most likely because they were privileged in those areas—and focused exclusively on sexuality.

As my participants continued to narrate their journeys to queer, they noted that their experiences of incongruency were lessened, but not fully erased, when they found or created their own queer communities. However, the instability and messiness of queerness requires one to have a high tolerance for ambiguity in that one has to come to their own understanding of what queer means since queerness resists definition. The ambiguity of queerness suited my participants, who found sexual orientation labels like gay, lesbian, and bisexual confining, inaccurate, and exclusive. They all reference their satisfaction with the inclusivity of queerness and feeling unencumbered by the identity politics of other, more essentializing labels. Alex's poignant line, "Gay is who you have sex with and queer is how you think," illustrates the ways in which queerness exceeds sexual orientation and is indicative of the intellectual quality of queerness and its ties to academic inquiry vis-à-vis the influence of queer theory. My participants and I mark our exposure to queer theory as an exigent moment that led us to identify as queer. While queer theory provided a lens through which we could better understand our experiences, we embodied queer identities before we were exposed to queer theory. In short, queer ways of being led to queer ways of thinking, and queer theory made both more comprehensible.

My participants all recount similar stories regarding our journeys to queer but neither them nor I speak of our queer identification as a final point, as we all

acknowledge the ongoing changes and challenges within a queer identification. The most relevant challenge across narratives was critically and reflexively engaging the intersection of queerness and maleness. The normative aspects of maleness, as evidenced by patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity, problematize our queer commitments to feminism and anti-violence when we acknowledge the ways in which the materiality of our bodies carry within them the historical citationality of oppressive patriarchy. This realization leads each of us to continually negotiate the dialectical tension of complicity and contestation that will never be fully ameliorated.

Cultural politics of representation were also an important theme within the narratives, as my participants critique the pervasive discourses of success in the U.S. for largely excluding anyone who is not white, masculine, and heterosexual. They also realize similar discourses operate within gay male communities to exclude those who are not white, monied, and masculine enough to remain well-positioned within the hierarchy of masculinities, a realization which motivated their move from gay-identified to queer-identified. Unpacking these intersections exposes how racial and cultural politics embedded within the process of representation work to maintain white supremacy and reinforce cultural othering across a range of identities. As my participants internalize this oppressive imagery (Moraga), they experience what Anzaldúa calls the "divided loyalties" that come with certain intersections of identities that span race, ethnicity, and immigration, among others. The unfair mandate to declare allegiance to one identity over another ignores the prevalence of intersecting cultural boundaries and the borderlands that exist within people who occupy multiple marginalized identities. Intersections of queerness and culture also include acknowledgment and critique of dominant identities.

Whiteness, an often-overlooked cultural influence (Warren, "Doing Whiteness"), is framed as an important part of the identities of my white participants, as they too critique authoritative hegemonic powers that are maintained through the oppression of others and attempt to use their privilege to undercut that authority.

The second research question asked: How do queer men experience their identities in relation to their bodies and personal politics? The theme of queer corporeality is important to my research on three levels. First, the body occupies a special place between the discursive and material since the human body is symbol-producing and a material surface upon which discourses are inscribed, subverted, and transformed. Second, combining queer theory and the performance paradigm, which challenges the modernist split between mind and body, pushes queer theory to account more for the body, which consequently begins to remedy queer theory's unbalanced attention to the discursive over materiality. Third, the performance paradigm critically focuses on the body within social and cultural contexts, which allows me to explore how the historical, social, and political discourses of othering gay male bodies make meaningful contemporary bodies and identities.

All my participants mention having body image issues extending from childhood and later recount feelings of ostracization in relation to mainstream representations of what gay male bodies "should" look like. While espousing a queer identity did not instantly fix our body image issues, it facilitated movement from body negativity to body positivity. Additionally, my participants who identify as queer men of color narrated the personal and material consequences resulting from their identities being essentialized, commodified, or ignored in mainstream gay culture. They realized that their race,

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ethnicity, and/or socio-economic status prohibited their identification with idealized gay male bodies, which are white and monied, leading them to dissociate more from these aspects of gay culture to which they were exposed.

Intersectionality and social justice are important components of queer politics, and my participants and I trace the development of our queer politics, at least partially in opposition to gay rights politics. Neither my participants nor I argue that queer is the antithesis of gay; however, most participants have previously identified as gay so they draw upon their first-hand experiences within gay communities when discussing their queer identities. Additionally, my participants do not negate the importance of legislative action for gay rights, but critique the "we're just like you" rhetorical strategy prevalent in the assimilationist gay rights movement. In order to contest assimilationist political discourses, my participants prioritize the day-to-day material effects of marginalized identities as a pressing political issue, and critique the near absence of voices of people with multiple marginalized identities within the mainstream gay rights movement. In summary, the narratives related to queer bodies and politics demonstrate the ways in which a queer consciousness has led these queer men to critique and contest idealized, narrow representations of bodies and reductive and assimilationist rhetoric within gay rights political discourses.

The third research question asked: How do queer men experience their identities in ways that contest and reproduce mainstream discourses regarding gay male bodies and gay rights issues? The instability of queerness as an avowed identity leads my participants and I to negotiate tensions that exist within and between a queer identification and the practicalities of living in a society where we find ourselves buying

into ideologies our queer identities critique. Espousing a queer identity opened up new discursive and material spaces for my participants and I to critically explore our bodies and politics, while remaining cognizant of and reflexive about the sometimes messy and contradictory aspects of queerness. While an ideology of body positivity is inherent within queer consciousness, participants still struggle to reconcile lingering body image issues that have contributed to, and may still result in, eating disorders, dieting, anxiety, and general body shame. The negotiation of queer politics is also contradictory at times, as queer politics engage with and critique the more normative politics of assimilationist gay rights discourses. In spite of these critiques, my participants and I acknowledge that many of us have or will benefit from the passage of legislation supported and financed by organizations like the HRC. Although queer men have agency to contest societal pressure, our evaluation and understanding of our bodies and our politics is always in relationship to dominant ideology. As Sandoval notes, even as we "break with ideology [we are] at the same time *also* speaking in, and from within, ideology" (44).

The final research question asked: How does a scholarly commitment to intersectional reflexivity manifest throughout the research process? As I mentioned earlier, intersectionality at its best already includes reflexivity, but intersectionality and reflexivity have various conceptualizations and have been employed in numerous ways, making a single understanding of the terms problematic. The conceptualization of intersectional reflexivity I offer acknowledges intersections of multiple identities and the systems of oppression and privilege that come with them within a self-reflexive framework that implicates the identities of researcher and researched within the politics and ethics of producing scholarship. Through my analysis, I theorize intersectional

reflexivity as a component of queer consciousness that leads toward coalitional activism. The narratives show a commitment to intersectionality and reflexivity that at times creates an "overwhelming" sense of accountability, which my participants and I view as part of our positionalities and political responsibilities. Reflexively turning in on one's self and critically evaluating one's identities in relation to larger society is intersectional reflexivity in action. While queerness could become exclusive if queer-identified people deemed others "not radical enough" or "not inclusive enough" to avow a queer identity, I believe the intersectional reflexivity within queer consciousness helps prevent queerness from becoming fixed and hence becoming static and exclusive.

The interconnections among intersectional reflexivity, queer consciousness, and coalitional activism became clear as I progressed through the narrative analysis. I argue this interconnection is a product of my participants' re-identification from gay to queer, which involved critiquing and separating themselves politically from an identity they once avowed, and resulted in consciousness-raising. Another commonality I found in the development of queer consciousness is linked with the transgender rights movement. My participants and I all identify as transgender or as trans allies, and our engagement in the trans rights movement has led us to critique gender in relation to societal norms. Critically evaluating gender also led us to acknowledge and contest elements of sexism, effemimania, hypermasculinity and other discourses and practices of exclusion within some gay male communities. Since most of us previously identified as gay, these realizations meant implicating ourselves in these practices, which requires uncomfortable self-reflexivity. In this sense, my conceptualization of queer consciousness extends others' definitions beyond reappropriating the character of being a sexual minority in

relation to heteronormative culture (Jung and Smith), to also reappropriate what it means to be a sexual minority from homonormative culture, or an assimilated view of what it means to be a gay man. In these examples, queer consciousness ruptures restrictive consciousness and begins to open one's mind to alternative representations of culture, the body, and politics. Queer ways of thinking have been explored in other political, social, and cultural contexts by Anzaldúa and hooks (*Talking Back*) who have privileged intersectionality and reflexivity. In all of these cases, queer consciousness acknowledges the agency within liminal, unfixed discursive and material spaces and the activist potential of such spaces.

By self-reflexively embodying their politics of location, my participants begin to move from the individual to a coalitional notion of the subject" (Rowe, "Be Longing" 16), which answers Cohen's call for coalitional activism and the expansion of queer politics beyond critiquing heteronormativity. For example, my participants acknowledge their privilege and locate it within an intersectional queer consciousness, which moves them from guilt regarding their privilege toward the action-oriented step of confronting racism and sexism. Critiquing the individualism of modernity can move critically minded and privileged scholars and citizens from selfish insularity to accountability to others and self. Acknowledging how we are embedded in power and privilege may allow us to "correct" ourselves "from a marginal vantage point" (20), which results in critical agency and leads toward coalitional activism.

All the conclusions above were made possible by mediating and negotiating the skeptical relationship between queer theory and identity-based research. My project negotiates a "vital dialectic between the constructionist and reifying tendencies of

interpretivism, on the one hand, and the deconstructionist, negating tendencies of queer theory, on the other" (Green 43). By reconceptualizing identity as plural, intersectional, instable, and partial, I successfully utilized a queer theoretical perspective to problematize representations of the self in political ways (Gamson, "Sexualities" 358-359), while still validating the subjective experiences of my participants (Alcoff, *Visible*; Sanchez). The malleability of queer theory and the interdisciplinary flexibility of Human Communication Studies were paired productively, illuminating some of the heuristic value of queer theory within the field.

Implications

As I noted in Chapter Two, there is heuristic value in pairing queer theory with Human Communication research. In this project, I use queer theory as a pivot point between my critical historicization and deconstruction of representations of gay male bodies and gay rights political discourses and my intersubjective communication with queer-identified participants. According to Gamson ("Sexualities") queer theory has already proven its heuristic value in its ability to challenge "the research agendas of more traditional fields of scholarship" (358), yet it is lacking in application to Human Communication Studies (Nicholas; Yep, Lovaas, and Elia, "Introduction"). This lack is both unfortunate and promising, but in both cases provides an opportunity for communication scholars to continue to make important contributions to queer studies.

Queer theory provides its most heuristic value in terms of how cultures and identities are studied, by providing new ways to think about how sexuality intersects with other identities in relation to power and how those differences are experienced. Queer theory gives us new lenses through which to view the complex interworkings of culture

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and how we can connect culture to identities in less essentializing and exclusive ways (Johnson and Henderson, "Introduction"). By creating a conceptual framework that combines some of the most promising parts of queer theory with personal narrative and performance, I have been able to employ intersubjective research methods involving face-to-face communication in intersectional ways that address critiques of queer theory. If communication scholars continue to explore the heuristic value of queer theory within various conceptual frameworks, this work promises to move our discipline more toward the cutting edge of new queer studies.

This research could also be used to more effectively support queer men. My participants and I have found or created self-selecting and localized queer communities, but would like to have more opportunities to share our queer perspectives with others. Since my participants note feeling excluded or uncomfortable in mainstream support systems for gay men, sharing my research with community organizations could help service providers better understand the experiences and needs of queer men. The liminality of queerness creates a space for possibility and transformation, but liminality can also breed isolation. Future research may be more action-oriented and work to create spaces for belonging within community organizations where people who may otherwise feel excluded can share their own narratives. Sharing stories and narratives can be liberating and can be a survival strategy for people who have been historically marginalized (Delgado). In this sense, my research using personal narrative is action-oriented, allowing marginalized voices to find public space in order to contest dominant narratives (Corey, "Personal").

Supporting queer men and educating gay and lesbian organizations about queerness may help raise awareness about marginalization and exclusion within gay communities, leading to more intersectional support mechanisms and potential for coalitional activism. Being more inclusive may also open the door for people who identify anywhere on the GLBTQ spectrum, but may feel excluded because of their race, ethnicity, class, or ability, to utilize important resources and services. GLBTQ people of color may especially feel torn between their cultural, ethnic, and sexual orientation identities since images of gay men and lesbian women are often narrow in terms of diversity (Espin and Chan). My participants' narratives highlight complex intersections of culture, gender, and sexual orientation and their material effects ranging from body image issues and surgical intervention, to eating disorders and low self-esteem. The complexities of identities should be understood by organizations that serve GLBTQ people, which may help mitigate feelings of incongruency and create a space of belonging.

Limitations and Future Research

Although my participants' backgrounds and experiences were diverse in many areas, diversity in terms of age, education, and geography was limited. Age is relevant to queer issues in that research has shown reactions to the use of queer as a reclaimed word differs generationally, with older gay men disavowing queer as pejorative and younger gay men being more open to its use (Fox, "Gay Grows"). Engaging in a queer intersectional analysis of cultures and identities with age as a focal point could illuminate complexity within and between identities that is absent in my current research. While midlife and later-life gays and lesbians have been researched in the fields of social work

(Kochman), psychiatry (Berger and Kelly), and sociology (J. Lee), among others, this research contributes to and draws upon gay and lesbian studies, but has not employed queer theory. Furthermore, age as a cultural identity category has been under examined in intercultural communication, even as society becomes more diverse in terms of intergenerational engagement (Allen). I am enticed by the possibility of pursuing this vein of research in order to deconstruct and examine the constructedness of wellness, illness, and ability within a framework that critiques the medicalization and social segregation of later-life people. There has been more research conducted on queer youth from a queer perspective that explores and unpacks the ways in which queer youth are pushing the boundaries of sexuality, gender, and other identities at younger ages (Driver), which may signify an approaching generation with a "queerer" consciousness.

Additionally, diversity in terms of education was a limitation in my research project. While my participants note their exposure to queer theory in college as a pivotal moment in developing their queer identity, I wonder how queer people who have not been exposed to queer theory in higher education organically make sense of their queerness through informal education.

Geographically, my participants come from different regions within the United States, but all currently reside in metropolitan areas. Exploring queer identities in more geographically rural areas may illuminate important environmental differences such as population, regional religious or cultural values, or lack of GLBTQ resources influence queer consciousness. Expanding the scope of this research to international contexts, which scholars in new queer studies are already doing, further complicates issues of identity (Baddruddoja; Manalansan). I plan on expanding my research to more

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international contexts in the near future by using queer theory to examine intersections among immigration, globalization, and human rights by engaging with issues such as sex tourism and sex trafficking.

There is an obvious lack of queer women's voices in this research project. While my choice to focus solely on queer men was intentional, I do not privilege male experience over female. Rather, my motivation for engaging in this research was heavily influenced by my experiences as a queer-identified man, and I did not want to risk conflating the history or current experiences of queer men and women. Further, focusing on queer men allowed me to offer a more precise critique and analysis of the historical, social, cultural, and political contexts that have informed and continue to effect gay and queer men. Future research could historicize representations of lesbianism and compare and contrast the experiences of queer women with lesbian women to see if themes regarding the body and politics emerge, and how they may relate to the experiences of queer men I have outlined in this project. The limitations within my project noted above also create viable opportunities for future research, which I hope queer scholars, including me, will pursue in order to further explore intersections of cultures and identities in diverse contexts.

After completing this project, I am now contemplating future expansions in organizational, activist, and performative contexts. I would like to assess GLBT community organizations in order to explore how including queer perspectives into their mission and services may lead to more inclusivity. I would also like to compare these organizations to already existing queer organizations like the Colorado Anti-Violence

Program and the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, which espouse queer perspectives, embrace

intersectionality, and work toward coalitional activism.[38]

I would also like to conduct ethnographic research with radical queer activist

groups to further explore how queer politics and activism, in its most radical forms,

intersect with cultures and identities. One such group is the "Radical Homosexual

Agenda" who describe themselves as "a contingent of the NYC queer community who

believes that our rights extend way beyond marriage." I am also particularly interested in

queer anarchists who use slogans such as "We're for fucking, not Starbucking,"

pontificate on "decadence" as a weapon through blogs where they say "Collapse, rapture,

whatever, things are getting interesting when they're falling apart," and hold conferences

where they invite workshops "themed around queer and trans liberation, anti-racism,

confronting patriarchy, sex work, ableism, self defense, DIY mental and sexual health,

radical history, pornography, or queer theory." I am also interested in exploring

intersections of sexuality and politics in groups like the National Coalition for Sexual

Freedom, which focuses on queer sexual practices that extend beyond hetero- and

homosexuality. Their mission is to advocate for the "rights of consenting adults in the

SM-leather-fetish, swing, and polyamory communities, who often face discrimination

because of their sexual expression."[39] As evidenced by these groups, queer activism is

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[38] These are just two of many organizations that demonstrate queer consciousness and politics, but these organizations are far outnumbered, out monied, and out voiced by organizations that do not privilege intersectionality and social justice. More information is available about these organizations at http://www.coavp.org and http://www.srlp.org/about.

[39] For more information on these organizations, visit these websites: http://www.radicalhomosexualagenda.org/; http://tribes.tribe.net/5cff2efd-ee8b-42a0-a380-6a84d0112c2c; http://anarchyisforeveryone.blogspot.com/2008/02/anarchism-decadence-4.html; http://www.ncsfreedom.org/.

not dead; however, it is definitely not very visible in scholarly and popular discourses. Researching these groups would help further explore queer activism in action.

I am also interested in putting my research into action in more performative contexts. I plan on crafting the personal narratives I have collected into versions suitable for public performance that can be used to better inform community organizations about queer issues or be tailored to address more specific issues like body image and body positivity or coalitional activism. By extending the performative dimensions of my research into action through public performance, I can create more dialogic spaces through which queer consciousness can interact with and influence people in ways that exceed this text.

Within these chapters, I have overviewed a multi-faceted conceptual framework that includes a critical historicization of gay male bodies and how historical narratives of othering connect to contemporary representations, critically evaluated the relationship between queer theory and identity, reviewed personal narrative as conceptualized through the performance paradigm, and introduced intersectional reflexivity as a paramethodological concept. By communicating with queer-identified men about their identities, bodies, and politics, I addressed critiques of queer theory, and found important themes, which demonstrate that queer theory has utility and meaning in the lives of real queer people whose queer consciousnesses privilege intersectional and reflexive social, cultural, and political perspectives. I have also discussed the potential for this research to make a contribution to Human Communication Studies and to queer people. As I now reach a major landmark in my progression as an academic and activist, I return to my personal narrative and close with ruminations on my journey to this point.

Academically *and* personally,
my goal is to connect theory *and* activism in ways that will have positive,
material effects for marginalized people,
and ultimately lead to social change.
…But,
my academic and activist identities are in *tension* with each other.
The academy tells me to focus my attention on developing an
"academic identity."
My heart wants me to take *action*,
with my body,
to make some change…
and not just write about it.
I enjoy my place in the academy,
…but I also have strong accountabilities to the groups I represent in my work,
and count myself a part of.
While it's not impossible to be successful in both areas,
as a critical activist scholar, I've been looked upon with suspicion.
But, as Conquergood ("Between") reminds me:
"The choice is no longer between pure and applied research.
Instead, we must choose between research that is
'engaged' or 'complicit'" (85).
My queer identity and my queer politics permeate all of my identities,
as does being an activist and an ally.
My queer political agenda is not just about calling out and critiquing
heteronormativity.
My queer project also involves fighting racism and sexism;
fighting for a more just economic system;
protesting development and promoting environmental sustainability;
and standing in solidarity with those in the disability rights movement,
who resist the medical model of disability and mental illness
that rationalizes and legitimates them being treated as
less than human,
and incarcerated,
and forcefully medicated
against
their
will.
At the theoretical and conceptual level,
this type of coalitional activism,
and blurring of boundaries between academic and personal,
is *not* new.
This blurring and bleeding is something that feminists,
especially feminists of color,

and queer scholars,
especially queer scholars of color,
picked up on long before other academics
who call themselves "critical" and "progressive" did.
Perhaps
"our"
whiteness
blinds
"us."
Critical scholars of color have been
yelling
at us to wake up and see things in a more complicated way,
and most of us have continued trucking on,
lulled, or perhaps sedated,
by our sense of critical superiority.
Afterall,
aren't we the most *critical* and *progressive* in our social circles?
Don't we deserve a pat on the back for being *so* critical and progressive?
No!
There's a lot more work to be done.
Many people don't have the privilege of rest, reward, or reassurance.
Many are sick and tired of being sick and tired…
yet they continue.
So, I can't, as a critical scholar, thinker, and activist,
be sick and tired of
occasionally stepping out of my privileged identities
to get my "hands dirty."
Because, I can *always* retreat to the safety of my privilege
when I want to,
or when the shit hits the fan.

I'm learning from the work others have done,
others who have different racial, ethnic, national, and ability identities than I do.
Work that I wasn't exposed to during the first 17 years of my education.

And I'm cautious and reflexive
about picking up and joining their conversation,
not appropriating their intellectual labor as my own invention,
as white people have tended to do and get away with.

Critical and embodied research is risky.
Conquergood ("Rethinking") reminds me that
bodily, physical, and emotional risks may come with engaged research,
and Behar says research that doesn't break your heart isn't worth doing.
Does suffering make research better?

How do we deal with the pain associated with research?
…In reality, we engage in these risks
everyday,
in what we have arbitrarily bracketed off as our "personal lives,"
through our interpersonal relationships,
which involve risk, emotion, pain, accountability, and an ethic of care.
And I struggle to resist this bracketing off,
because…
I *am* the field.

Alexander ("Telling") encourages me to not let my
performance as researcher overshadow the *desire* that *motivates* my research.
I did not choose or ask for overlapping academic and personal identities.
I *became* a scholar in order to understand my identities.
As an organic intellectual,
my research has always been driven by a *personal* and *political longing*
to better understand myself and my world.
Being a critically engaged academic *and* community member is not a choice,
it's a *mandate* that has been passed to me
by *my* academic and community mentors.
I *am* the field.
And I will not be made to feel powerless,
deficient,
pathologized,
sinful,
or unworthy,
because I hear Corey ("Personal") whispering in my ear:
"Each queer has a little story,
but in the spirit of postmodernism,
a little difference becomes a lot of discourse" (250).

Part of telling my story means,
first being reflexive in regards to my identities,
and the privileges and disadvantages that come with them.

Not reflection,
not just light going back and forth
all neatly contained within the laws of physics.
Reflexivity is the ceaseless process of reflection and refraction.
…Self-reflection might scratch the surface.
Self-reflexivity *cuts to the bone*.
It implicates you…
It forces you to acknowledge that you are complicit
in the perpetuation of oppression.
It's uncomfortable.

That's why people don't like to do it.
…Reflexivity has got to hurt.
It's laborious.
But, while it may be laborious for me to
"go out of my way"
to intervene in how I perform privilege,
I must also recognize that it's a
privilege
to not have my performance
always
already
marked…
as marginal.

"All Aboard the Critical Scholar Rhizomatic Underground Railroad!"

I'm trying to find a balance,
between work that stays confined in the intellectually hegemonic walls
of the academy,
and work that makes a difference,
and touches people outside those walls
in an *accessible* and *meaningful* way.

I've received a "call to action" to reveal subjugated knowledges.
Gingrich-Philbrook ("Autoethnography") wakes me up at night,
and tells me that differential knowledges are,
"incapable of unanimity,"
and gain their force through
"the *harshness* with which [they are] opposed
by *everything* surrounding [them]" (311),
and, I am inspired by his call for a
"rhizomatic approach"
to queering knowledge through performance.
I try to do this through intersubjective research methods
that connect *me* with people in my *communities*,
and through critical pedagogy
that hopefully *plants seeds* of *critical thinking* within my students.
These actions illuminate and contribute to
rich patches of rhizomes in the *community*,
which I can touch…
draw nourishment from…
and reciprocate nurture.

So, this is the call I bring to you…
acknowledge your privilege,

be self-reflexive,
jump into the *messiness*.
Put your body in spaces where you are at *risk*,
because doing so may create a safe space for someone else.

There's a vast connection of rhizomes
that is only sporadically visible,
because most of them are underground,
are hidden,
are subjugated.
Perhaps this could be the "underground railroad" through which we,
as activist-scholars,
can safely transport our "radical" and critical ways of thinking to community…
to begin a *transformation*…
to begin a *revolution*!

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

Informed Consent (1st Meeting)

You are invited to participate in a study that will examine your experiences as a queer male. This study is being conducted to explore how queer men experience their identities in contexts that occur in their everyday lives. Rich Jones, the primary researcher is a doctoral student at DU in Human Communication Studies. He can be reached at 303-547-8011 or rjones9@du.edu. Dr. Bernadette Calafell professor and faculty advisor can be reached at 303-871-4322 or Bernadette.Calafell@du.edu. This study and consent form were approved by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research on March 27, 2008.

Participation in this part of the study should take approximately 90 minutes of your time. You may be asked for two more follow-up meetings to discuss your responses with Rich Jones. These meetings, should you be asked for a follow-up, should also last approximately 90 minutes each. Participation in this part of the study will involve responding to questions about your experiences as a queer male. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and confidential. In addition, should you choose you can request a follow-up interview with the primary researcher at any time over the duration of the study. At no time will you be requested to associate your name with your answers. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although the research does not address the following: suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, we are required by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning these topics that it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.

The benefits of being involved in this research include becoming more aware of your own experiences as a queer man and making a strong contribution to existing research in queer communication studies. If you experience discomfort you may stop participating at any time. In addition, we respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will not involve a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Although it is not anticipated, if you are in need of any mental or emotional assistance following this study, the DU Health and Counseling Center is located on the third floor of the Ritchie Center. The Health and Counseling Center can be reached at 303-871-3511. If you are in the Denver area, the University of Denver Professional Psychology Center (303-871-3626) offers counseling to the community and has a sliding scale for fees. If you are outside of the Denver area, the National Mental Health Association (NMHA) Resource Center (1-800-969-6642, www.nmha.org) can provide information and help in finding community-based mental health services and individual therapists. The 1-800-Therapist Network (1-800-843-7274, www.1-800-therapist.com) provides referrals to

therapists through its international network. Additional information and referral options are listed on the NMHA website (http://nmha.org/go/faqs/).

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the study, please contact Dr. Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at (303) 871-3454 or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Sponsored Programs at (303) 871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please ask the researcher any questions you have. If you understand and agree to the above, please sign the following page.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of this research study. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have also received a copy of this consent form.

_____
Participant Name

_____   _____
Participant Signature   Date

In addition, I agree to be audio-recorded with the understanding that these audio-recordings will be used for the purposes of this research study and transcribed using psuedonyms to protect my confidentiality.

___ I agree to be audio-recorded.

___ I do not agree to be audio-recorded

_____
Participant Name

_____   _____
Participant Signature   Date

Informed Consent (2nd Meeting)

You are invited to participate in a study that will examine your experiences as a queer male. This study is being conducted to explore how queer men experience their identities in contexts that occur in their everyday lives. Rich Jones, the primary researcher is a doctoral student at DU in Human Communication Studies. He can be reached at 303-547-8011 or rjones9@du.edu. Dr. Bernadette Calafell professor and faculty advisor can be reached at 303-871-4322 or Bernadette.Calafell@du.edu.

Participation in this part of the study should take approximately 90 minutes of your time. You may be asked for one more follow-up meeting to discuss your responses with Rich Jones. This meeting, should you be asked for a follow-up, should also last approximately 90 minutes. Participation in this part of the study will involve reviewing your responses from the previous meeting and refining and/or elaborating on particular responses. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and confidential. In addition, should you choose you can request a follow-up interview with the primary researcher at any time over the duration of the study. At no time will you be requested to associate your name with your answers. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although the research does not address the following: suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, we are required by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning these topics that it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.

The benefits of being involved in this research include becoming more aware of your own experiences as a queer man and making a strong contribution to existing research in queer communication studies. If you experience discomfort you may stop participating at any time. In addition, we respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will not involve a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Although it is not anticipated, if you are in need of any mental or emotional assistance following this study, the DU Health and Counseling Center is located on the third floor of the Ritchie Center. The Health and Counseling Center can be reached at 303-871-3511. If you are in the Denver area, the University of Denver Professional Psychology Center (303-871-3626) offers counseling to the community and has a sliding scale for fees. If you are outside of the Denver area, the National Mental Health Association (NMHA) Resource Center (1-800-969-6642, www.nmha.org) can provide information and help in finding community-based mental health services and individual therapists. The 1-800-Therapist Network (1-800-843-7274, www.1-800-therapist.com) provides referrals to therapists through its international network. Additional information and referral options are listed on the NMHA website (http://nmha.org/go/faqs/).

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the study, please contact Dr. Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at (303) 871-3454 or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Sponsored Programs at (303) 871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

This study was approved by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research on March 27, 2008.

If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please ask the researcher any questions you have. If you understand and agree to the above, please sign the following page.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of this research study. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have also received a copy of this consent form.

_____
Participant Name

_____   _____
Participant Signature   Date

In addition, I agree to be audio-recorded with the understanding that these audio-recordings will be used for the purposes of this research study and transcribed using psuedonyms to protect my confidentiality.

___ I agree to be audio-recorded.
___ I do not agree to be audio-recorded

_____
Participant Name

_____   _____
Participant Signature   Date

Informed Consent (3rd Meeting)

You are invited to participate in a study that will examine your experiences as a queer male. This study is being conducted to explore how queer men experience their identities in contexts that occur in their everyday lives. Rich Jones, the primary researcher is a doctoral student at DU in Human Communication Studies. He can be reached at 303-547-8011 or rjones9@du.edu. Dr. Bernadette Calafell professor and faculty advisor can be reached at 303-871-4322 or Bernadette.Calafell@du.edu.

Participation in this part of the study should take approximately 90 minutes of your time. Participation in this part of the study will involve reviewing your responses from the previous meetings and refining and/or elaborating on particular responses and reflecting on your involvement in this research project so far. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and confidential. In addition, should you choose you can request a follow-up interview with the primary researcher at any time over the duration of the study. At no time will you be requested to associate your name with your answers. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although the research does not address the following: suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, we are required by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning these topics that it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.

The benefits of being involved in this research include becoming more aware of your own experiences as a queer man and making a strong contribution to existing research in queer communication studies. If you experience discomfort you may stop participating at any time. In addition, we respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will not involve a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Although it is not anticipated, if you are in need of any mental or emotional assistance following this study, the DU Health and Counseling Center is located on the third floor of the Ritchie Center. The Health and Counseling Center can be reached at 303-871-3511. If you are in the Denver area, the University of Denver Professional Psychology Center (303-871-3626) offers counseling to the community and has a sliding scale for fees. If you are outside of the Denver area, the National Mental Health Association (NMHA) Resource Center (1-800-969-6642, www.nmha.org) can provide information and help in finding community-based mental health services and individual therapists. The 1-800-Therapist Network (1-800-843-7274, www.1-800-therapist.com) provides referrals to therapists through its international network. Additional information and referral options are listed on the NMHA website (http://nmha.org/go/faqs/).

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If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please ask the researcher any questions you have. If you understand and agree to the above, please sign the following page.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of this research study. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have also received a copy of this consent form.

_____
Participant Name

_____   _____
Participant Signature   Date

In addition, I agree to be audio-recorded with the understanding that these audio-recordings will be used for the purposes of this research study and transcribed using psuedonyms to protect my confidentiality.

___ I agree to be audio-recorded.
___ I do not agree to be audio-recorded

_____
Participant Name

_____   _____
Participant Signature   Date

APPENDIX B: PROMPTS FOR NARRATIVE CO-CONSTRUCTION

Prompts for Narrative Co-Construction

1. What does queerness mean to you?

2. When did you identify as queer?

3. Why do you identify as queer and not gay?

4. How do queerness and maleness relate to each other in your experience?

5. What does it mean to have a queer body?

6. What does it mean to have queer politics?