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“My Masculinity Is a Little Love Poem to Myself”: Trans*masculine College Students’ Conceptualizations of Masculinities

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

“MY MASCULINITY IS A LITTLE LOVE POEM TO MYSELF”:
TRANS*MASCULINE COLLEGE STUDENTS’ CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF
MASCULINITIES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

BY

T.J. JOURIAN

CHICAGO, IL

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ABSTRACT

Men and masculinities studies in higher education are gaining prominence within the literature, illuminating how cisgender men understand and grapple with masculinity on college campuses. Additionally, the increased visibility of trans* students has fueled the expanding scholarship and attention to their experiences, often however centering on White gender-conforming trans* students with little if any focus on their multiple and intersecting identities. This phenomenological study seeks to bridge these two areas of literature, by investigating how trans*masculine students understand, define, and adopt a masculine identity, and how that identity is informed by their various intersecting and salient identities. Dominant masculinities function as thresholds for trans*masculine college students exploring their identity, as they construct multiple trans*masculine pathways.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation study focuses on trans*masculine students' conceptualizations, understandings and definitions of masculinity. Additionally, the study investigates how trans*masculine students' intersecting identities influence these definitions. This study seeks to fill gaps in and extend the literature on men and masculinities in higher education, the literature on trans* students in higher education, and to build a connective bridge between the two streams. This chapter includes a review of pertinent terminology and concepts, an articulation of the problem the study seeks to address and its significance, and an overview of the dissertation's organization.

Colleges and universities in the U.S. serve as the context for this study. As sites and purveyors of both "oppression and resistance" (Stockdill & Danico, 2012, p. 1), higher education institutions are ideally situated to be examined as locales of genderism (Bilodeau, 2009) and hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005), as well as – paradoxically – spaces where social movements and student activism resist these systems (Marine, 2011; Pasque & Nicholson, 2011; Rojas, 2012). Pragmatically, as a higher education scholar and former student affairs practitioner, I have personal, intellectual, and professional knowledge about, as well as ongoing interest in the context. These experiences also provide an access point to trans*masculine students through professional

associations and colleagues. The results of this study has implications for trans* studies and gender liberation, men and masculinities studies, as well as within student affairs and higher education practice and scholarship overall. A core implication for student affairs practice that this study has is rethinking how constructs of masculinity and manhood are interpreted when designing programmatic interventions with ‘men’ in mind (Davis, LaPrad, & Dixon, 2011).

Terminology

Language describing gendered and sexed identities and people is continuously “under construction” (Stryker, 2008a, p. 1). Prior to examining specific terms, I substantiate concepts of sex and gender in which they are based. The medical establishment exerts a significant amount of power in naming what is (one’s) sex and driving policies that rely on sex classifications, which in turn “cause significant vulnerability to invasive questioning, verbal ridicule, exclusion, and even physical violence by administrative agents, and the public at large” (Davis, 2014, p. 46), particularly for migrant trans* bodies of color (Cotten, 2012; Davis, 2014; Spade, 2011). It is thus important to understand the power of definitions and question their sources, frameworks, intentions, impacts, and even necessity in the context of administrative processes.

Useful definitions were found in Lev’s 2004 book *Transgender Emergence: Therapeutic Guidelines for Working with Gender-Variant People and their Families*. Lev’s (2004) constructivist approach to gender, informed by trans* narratives and a postmodern critique to the gender binary, makes these definitions applicable to this

context. However, natal or biological sex has been renamed to sex assigned at birth. This is to avoid the positioning of a fixedness or naturalness on sex, or a value-less starting point, rather than a project of assignment that promotes genderism, binary gender systems, and policies and laws that harm those that deviate from those systems (Davis, 2014; Wilchins, 2004).

Lev (2004) examined the four components of sexual identity, as she referred to the combination of the categories of (i) sex assigned at birth (referred to in the text as natal or biological sex); (ii) gender identity; (iii) gender(-role) expression; and (iv) sexual orientation. These categories are described as follows:

- i. “the physiological makeup of a human being... a complex relationship of genetic, hormonal, biochemical, and anatomical determinants that impact the physiology of the body and the sexual differentiation of the brain” (p. 80).
- ii. “a person’s self-concept of his or her gender...” (p. 81).
- iii. “the expression of masculinity and femininity... thought to be reflections of one’s gender identity and are socially dictated and reinforced. It is through gender roles that gender is enacted or ‘performed’” (p. 84).
- iv. “the self-perception of one’s sexual preference and emotional attraction... experienced through the person’s gender identity” (p. 85).

The above definitions are used in this study to differentiate between sex, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. The term gender by itself often refers to gender identity. These distinctions are particularly useful when discussing lesbian,

bisexual, gay, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI) people and communities. The use of LGBTQI or other variations of this acronym (e.g., LGBT, LGBTQ, BLGTA, and so on as referenced in cited literature) at times falsely lead a reader to assume that issues concerning both sexual orientation *and* gender identity are discussed, when that may not be the case. The study will thus at times refer to only a segment of that population (e.g., ‘gay and lesbian people’) to either denote that a particular issue or article is only meant for or about that segment (as needs and concerns are not ubiquitous for the entire population), or alternately to highlight the invisibility of the unnamed segments, most commonly bisexual, trans*, and intersex people. The habit of aggregating LGBTQI populations also perpetuates misinformation on how an individual may be more than one of those letters at a time. For example, an intersex person may also identify as trans* and as a lesbian.

The terms most relevant and most used in this study are trans* and trans*masculine, which at times may alternate with other terms used in reviewed literature, as these are not widely used in scholarly writing and research. *Trans**, alternately trans or transgender, refers to people whose gender identity does not align as societally expected to one’s sex assigned at birth. The asterisk at the end of the term is used to “open up *transgender* or *trans* to a greater range of meanings” (Tompkins, 2014, p. 26). As trans and particularly transgender is often seen to only include “binary notions of transness” meaning “only... trans men and trans women” (Tompkins, 2014, p. 27), the asterisk denotes inclusion of other gender nonconforming identities, such as genderqueer, genderfluid, agender, and many others that individuals adopt when accessible vocabulary

is not enough. Similarly, the asterisk in *trans*masculine* is used to expand on terms such as trans man or female-to-male. Trans*masculine offers more than just man or male as options to those assigned female at birth who do not identify as women or female. This opens up the term to further contestations of the gender binary even within trans* perspectives. Furthermore, it serves as a signal to potential participants that the study does not seek to limit participation to those that identify as men or who seek to physically transition through hormonal or surgical procedures.

In order to de-normalize those who do not identify as trans*, it is important to have language to describe them as well, avoiding confusion or phrases such as biologically or traditionally gendered that align with normalcy. Instead, the study uses the term *cisgender* to describe people who generally experience congruence between their assigned sex at birth and the gender they are expected to identify with by extension. The creation of the term, as well as the critique of normalizing cis-ness, emerged from within trans* activist spaces and discourse (Aultman, 2014). At times, the term *cishet* will also be used to describe those who identify as both cisgender and heterosexual (Russo, 2014).

Problem Statement

The ways in which language normalizes or destabilizes gender can also be seen as part of the problem the study seeks to address, which is examined here. The study of men and masculinities emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a profeminist response to the men's rights movement, itself a conservative backlash to the gains made by women in society up to that point (Brod, 1987; Clatterbaugh, 1990). As an interdisciplinary study

“of men *as men*” (Shapiro, 1981, p. 122), the investigation of men and masculinities is a relatively new endeavor, with the focus on college men’s identities and developmental needs barely a couple of decades old (Capraro, 2004). Within higher education as well, scholars have argued there is a need to study college men’s experiences from a gendered perspective. Despite much of the foundational literature used in the field being based on men’s lives and development (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010), gender as a construct or process was not purposefully examined, thus this literature is also relatively new (Davis & Laker, 2004; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris & Barone, 2011).

Scholars have rightfully identified the need to discuss masculinities in their plurality, as the construction of masculinities are differentiated by culture and time (e.g., Aboim, 2010; Person, 2006), and this is also evident in the higher education scholarship (e.g., Harper & Harris, 2010; Laker & Davis, 2011). Harper and Harris (2010) and Laker and Davis (2011) demonstrated this plurality by showcasing racial, sexual, socio-economic, and ability-related identity intersections, as well as diverse environmental contexts such as athletics, community colleges, minority-serving institutions, and fraternity life.

Despite the growing attention to masculinities on college campuses, these conceptions are overwhelmingly driven by and about cisgender men. Cisgender refers to those whose gender identity aligns with what is normatively expected based on sex assignment at birth (Aultman, 2014; Crethar & Vargas, 2007; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). Thus cisgender men, or cis men, are those who consider themselves men and were assigned male at birth. As masculinity is not the exclusive domain of men (Person,

1999), there is a significant gap in the literature when the discussion of masculinities is solely restricted to men's experiences, all of whom are assumed to be or presented as cis men, and when 'men', 'male', and 'masculinities' are used interchangeably (Marine, 2013). In addition to masculine-identified women that Person (1999) discussed, masculinity studies fail to include the experiences and understandings of trans* students. By excluding trans* students, studies on college men and masculinities are missing the perspectives of a crucial population. These studies thus essentialize masculinity as something only cisgender men embody, reifying the binary gender model (Bilodeau, 2009; Lev, 2004). This reification in turn maintains the supremacy of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005) and the adverse impact of sex-classification policies on gender non-conforming people's lives through administrative processes, (Davis, 2014). An example of the latter includes harassment at or exclusion from campus events and spaces requiring student IDs with sex-markers that a person inspecting deems does not match the student's presentation.

Furthermore, trans* students are increasingly and more visibly present at U.S. higher education institutions (Beemyn, 2003; Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005). Despite their presence there is limited research exploring their experiences and perspectives, partly due to their assumed inclusion in aggregated LGBTQI research (Renn, 2010). In addition to the research on trans* students being limited as a whole, it is also aggregated itself, leaving the diversity of gender expression and identities present within trans* populations unacknowledged. These studies also do not explore trans* students conceptualizations of masculinities and femininities and variations thereof, even

when they explore their gender identity development. The latter and the practice of mass aggregation of trans* students continue to present trans* students not just as a monolithic group, but also as one entirely separate and deviant from cisgender men and cisgender women, further entrenching trans* students as ‘other’.

Significance

Research considering men and masculinities from a gendered perspective begins to de-normalize the experiences of (White, able-bodied, heterosexual) cis-male students as generalizable to the experiences of all students. However, the invisibility of trans* perspectives and the use of sex, gender identity, and gender expression terms interchangeably normalizes cisgender men’s conceptions of masculinity. The existence of trans* people destabilizes binary and essentialist notions of gender, enlightening the performativity and fluidity of gender identity and role, including constructs such as masculinity and femininity (Berila, 2011; Hart & Lester, 2011). The experience of trans* students in general and trans*masculine students in particular can illuminate how masculinity is understood, defined, and conceptualized on college campuses from the perspective of those who figuratively and/or literally move across genders.

These potentially divergent understandings have much to offer. Much of the ongoing impetus to study masculinity is to reduce the toxicity of and harm caused by hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005; Harper & Harris, 2010; Kimmel, 2008; Laker and Davis, 2011; O’Neil, 2008), such as homophobia (Kimmel, 2010), violence against women (Katz, 2006), unhealthy sexual and physical practices (Courtenay, 2000, 2011; O’Neil & Crapser, 2011), and the internalized pressures of conformity to a narrowly

prescribed manhood (Davis, 2002; Edwards & Jones, 2009). This study thus may infer new ways to address these ongoing issues and be potentially liberating and life-saving for cisgender college men, as well as the women and trans* people harmed by cisgender men's halted development (Kimmel & Davis, 2011). For all students, this study has the potential to affirm the varied ways they understand themselves and their genders, liberating them from the constraints of a limiting and dangerous gender binary (Wilchins, 2004). Additionally, by elevating trans* students' voices, the study may further provide validation of trans* lives, resilience, and perspectives, so often sorely missing from higher education literature and practice that is not specifically for or about trans* students. This could in turn have implications for trans* students' sense of belonging in higher education, involvement on campus, persistence and academic success, and the campus climate for trans* students. At the institutional and structural level, all of this may incrementally contribute to higher education becoming more of a site for resistance and liberation rather than oppression (Stockdill & Danico, 2012) and promote societal liberation for trans* people within and outside of higher education.

This study is thus also significant in its potentially wider impact on trans* lives, at a time when both the visibility of trans* individuals in the media and violence particularly against trans*women of color are both heightened. From recurring trans* characters in mainstream TV shows such as "The Fosters" and "Glee", the highlighting of the media-based careers of Laverne Cox and Janet Mock – both importantly Black trans*women – and the stories of trans* athletes such as Kye Allums, Fallon Fox, and Chris Mosier (Stulberg, 2014), it appears as though the U.S. mainstream, however one

might define that, is finally wrapping its mind around the fact that trans* people exist. The boundaries of what trans*ness even means are being challenged by individuals who are defying binary representations of gender, such as Tyler Ford (2015) and Jaden Smith (Pritchard, 2016). How individuals, news stories, organizations, or institutions understand, portray, or react to trans* people's existence is complicated to say the least, far too complicated to delve into here, but worthy of consideration. However, this visibility has not translated to improving the livelihoods and safety of trans* people, a point Laverne Cox herself often makes (e.g., Berenson, 2015). For example, 2015 began violently for trans*women of color in particular, with seven trans*women of color, mostly Black, being murdered in the first two months alone. The intersections of racism, classism, misogyny, misogynoir (term created to describe anti-Black misogyny; Bailey, 2013), and cissexism both place trans*women of color at an incredibly violent and discriminating nexus of oppressions (Harrison-Quintana, De Guzman, Chaudry, & Grant, 2012; Harrison-Quintana, Fitzgerald, & Grant, 2012; Harrison-Quintana, Lettman-Hicks, & Grant, 2011; Harrison-Quintana, Pérez, & Grant, 2012; Harrison-Quintana, Quach, & Grant, 2013), as well as render their struggles, lives, and even deaths invisible (Busey, 2015; Lee, 2015; Molloy, 2015).

The severity and urgency of the current moment in trans* lives cannot be underemphasized and this study must be placed and understood in the context of this moment. This is not to imply that this study will address and solve this violence, but rather that it holds potentials that when extended towards their theoretical and practical possibilities should and could offer us new ways to understand the violence against and

exclusion of trans*women structurally and institutionally. As (cisgender heterosexual) men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators of violence against trans* people (Kelley & Gruenewald, 2015), problematizing hegemonic masculinity and highlighting a plurality of non-toxic, non-violent, and anti-oppressive masculinities challenges ‘boys will be boys’ mentalities that justify violence and draw an unbreakable tie to manhood (Kimmel, 2008; 2010). Thus it is imperative and potentially life-saving to question taken-for-granted understandings of masculinity and offer up less harmful alternatives.

Furthermore, disconnecting masculinity from heterosexuality and heteronormativity (Kimmel, 2010; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009), would reduce heterosexual cisgender men’s perceived need to validate their masculinity and heterosexuality through violence against trans*women. As one study found “for men, beliefs about gender roles, gender identity, and sexual orientation, and the use of violence and aggression to maintain power, are all driven by a common [hegemonic masculine] ideology” (Nagoshi, et al., 2008, 529). This ideology makes it undesirable and difficult for men to express attraction towards trans*women, casting trans*women as undesirable themselves (Mock, 2013), and often further contributing to violence against them when their male suitors are ‘caught’ interacting with them (Kelley & Gruenewald, 2015; Mock, 2013). Thus, creating the space for more nuanced and complex understandings of the relationships between sexualities and genders, particularly masculinities and manhoods, affirming the diverse and divergent way in which they intersect and interplay with each other, is a necessity in the quest to affirm trans*women in their diverse and divergent femininities and create a safer world for them in which to thrive.

This safety, which eludes trans* people and especially trans*women across social and institutional settings, including educational institutions, must be assured if we are to discuss access to higher education (Grant, Mottet, & Tanis, 2011). Even as this study focuses on trans*masculine college students, it also asks who gets to be in higher education. The invisibility and isolation of trans* people and identities (Bilodeau, 2009) combined with the dominance of masculine discourses in higher education (Allan, Gordon, & Iverson, 2006; Evans et al., 2010), often mean that trans*masculine – and specifically White able-bodied transmale – students’ experiences and narratives are taken as representative of trans* presence on and needs within higher education. Rarely is the hyper invisibility of trans*women and trans*feminine people on campuses called into question. The focus on trans*masculine college students in this study does to some degree expand the dominance of masculine discourse within trans* and higher education literature, and that reality must be acknowledged, as it reifies trans*women’s hyper-invisibility. Similar to how the foundational literature in the field has been based on (cisgender) men’s lives and development without an expressly gendered perspective in place (Capraro, 2004; Evans et al., 2010), so too does the literature on trans* students need to be investigated through gendered perspectives – the lack of which appears ironic to me – in order to destabilize the unnamed dominance of trans*masculine narratives. Thus, indirectly, this study highlights the lack of attention given to trans*femininities in higher education scholarship and practice.

Finally, by centering trans*masculine college students in (re)conceptualizing masculinity, the study also asks another important question: what might it mean to build

from a place of plurality and resilience rather than singularity and deficit? How might trans*masculine college students' stories of navigating masculinity/ies, femininity/ies, and androgyny/ies present us with limitless possibilities to resisting dominant orientations across identities (Ahmed, 2006)? As the exclusion of certain types of information (e.g., trans*masculinities) and the privileging of other (e.g., dominant cis masculinity/ies) in epistemology informs the formations of subjects (e.g., what or who is masculine), disclosures of alternatives is needed in order to inspect their very exclusions (Ferguson, 2004). By disclosing a plurality of alternatives (i.e., investigating and sharing the stories of masculinities from a variety of raced, classed, and sexualized locations), this study contributes to debunking the myth that identities and social constructs are formed in isolation from each other (Ferguson, 2004), which in turn could have far-reaching effects for gender liberation. The aim of this study is to give voice to trans*masculine students' conceptions of masculinity and how their experiences in colleges and universities informs these conceptions.

Organization of Dissertation

This chapter introduced the study purpose, significance, and relevant terminology. Chapter two provides the conceptual framework and literature review guiding the study, followed by chapter three, which introduces the research questions and addresses the study's methodology. Chapters four and five present the study's findings and share the participants' voices. Finally, chapter six provides a summary discussion and the implications of the dissertation study. In summary, this study aimed to investigate trans*masculine students' conceptualizations and definitions of masculinity.

Furthermore, it aimed to investigate how these conceptualizations are informed by various intersecting identities.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relevant literature pertinent to the need for and significance of this study is reviewed in this chapter. The proposed conceptual framework preceding the review informs the lens through which the literature was examined and critiqued. First, literature on masculinity in higher education is addressed, followed by literature on trans* college students. The first strand includes how masculinity is formed, its various impacts, and the diversity of its manifestations. The second review includes literature on campus climate for trans* students, their experiences with involvement and leadership, and trans* identity development. Through these two primary strands of literature, the study seeks to identify and bridge an intersecting gap, the conception and adoption of masculinity by trans*masculine students.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (see Appendix A) for this literature review and the overall study is informed by the contexts of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005) and genderism (Bilodeau, 2009) that situate how trans*masculine students understand themselves and the world around them, including within higher education institutions. These contexts are recognized and challenged through the lenses of critical trans politics (Spade, 2011), disidentification (Muñoz, 1999), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991, 2003),

and theory as liberatory practice (hooks, 1994). Finally, these lenses are further supplanted and biased by my own gender journey.

The Social and Institutional Context

Hegemonic masculinity frames the social and institutional context in which all genders maintain and are affected by a dominant masculinity (Connell, 2005). Connected to patriarchy and gender power structures, hegemonic masculinity is “the pattern of practice... that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). Connell’s (2005) notion of a hegemonic masculinity names its dominance over women, as well as subordinated masculinities that do not meet patriarchal standards.

Hegemonic masculinity is invisible precisely because it is ubiquitous. All genders contribute to maintaining and reconstructing hegemonic masculinity simply by continuing the seemingly innocuous practices and behaviors in which it is embedded and engrained (Brookfield, 2005; Kimmel & Davis, 2011; Wagner, 2011). Thus, it is constructed and performative (Butler, 2004; Connell, 2005). Scholars in and out of higher education acknowledge the plurality of masculinities (e.g., Aboim, 2010; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Harper & Harris, 2010; Laker & Davis, 2011; Person, 2006). However, not all are considered authentic or desirable, evidenced by the presence of preceding descriptors distinguishing them: queer masculinities, indigenous masculinities (Wagner, 2011). Connell (2005) cautioned that while it was imperative to recognize multiple masculinities (and femininities), attention should be paid so as not to oversimplify them to “*a black masculinity or a working-class masculinity*” (p. 76). This

is important as the recognition of not just multiple, but intersectionally informed masculinities (and femininities), as well as their validation can push for the reconstruction and transformation of all masculinities (and femininities), emancipating all from the power of hegemony and allowing for a broader range of gender expressions and identities to exist.

Hegemonic masculinity is constructed both in relation to femininities and to divergent and subordinated masculinities (Connell, 2005). Thus, it must be understood as a patriarchal ideology that ‘others’ femininities and non-hegemonic masculinities. Androgyny is not even a factor, due to a strict binary gender system – explored further later in this section – that does not acknowledge realities other than male masculine men and female feminine women (Bilodeau, 2009; Lev, 2004). It is first and foremost a domination strategy meant to subjugate women (external hegemony), which also extends its subjugation to masculinities that fail to meet the hegemonic standard through constant interaction (internal hegemony).

The domination of one masculinity over all others is supported by subordinated and marginalized masculinities by a shared belief that the hegemonic form is indeed superior (Connell, 2005). Kimmel (2008) identified three cultures that support this status quo, what he referred to as *Guyland*. The culture of entitlement elevates men’s sense of superiority and suppresses their empathy. The culture of silence removes men’s ability to speak up to voice either their own pain or to object to other men’s violence. The culture of protection, enacted by men themselves as well as the communities around them, preserves these violent and oppressive behaviors. These cultures are also present within

higher education institutions where administrators often lack the necessary consciousness about the presence of hegemonic masculinity or its harmful impact (O'Neil & Crapser, 2011). Without that consciousness, they are unable to appropriately address hegemonic masculinity and intervene programmatically.

Kimmel's (2008) three cultures were present at Penn State University, where former football assistant coach Jerry Sandusky, engulfed by the culture of entitlement and lacking empathy for his victims, sexually assaulted young boys (Chappell, 2012). The victims, whose age, vulnerability, and Sandusky's action subordinated their masculinity, as well as others who were aware of the abuse who chose silence or were silenced (culture of silence). When Sandusky's assaults were made public, a vocal student, alumni, and football fan community circled around the then coach, Joe Paterno, who was fired for his role in protecting Sandusky, instead accusing those who came forward of betraying the football team and the university (culture of protection both by Paterno and the aforementioned vocal community). Although the university released information detailing its response (The Pennsylvania State University, 2011), there is little if any indication that there was an understanding of how hegemonic masculinity played a role in Sandusky's actions, those who covered for him, and those who came to the defense of those who protected him. Without such an understanding it is unlikely that the appropriate interventions can be instituted to avoid the reoccurrence of similar instances.

In addition to hegemonic masculinity, the social and institutional context in which trans*masculine students are situated is entrenched in genderism (Bilodeau, 2009). Genderism – sometimes also referred to as cissexism or cisgenderism – is a cultural and

systemic ideology that assumes and regulates gender as a binary that is essentialized and based on sex assignment at birth, pathologizing and denigrating gender identities that do not conform (Bilodeau, 2009). Genderism impacts everyone, but has a particularly oppressing, violent, and daily presence in trans* people's lives navigating institutional structures and processes that administrate gender within a narrow and polarized binary (Spade, 2011). As a result of a two-year qualitative research study focused on 10 trans* students' experiences at two large Midwestern research intensive institutions, Bilodeau (2009) discovered that genderism presented four characteristics within higher educational institutions.

The first characteristic described the documenting and classifying practices of gender by administrative agencies that determine one's gender based predominantly on one's sex assigned at birth (Spade, 2011). This *institutionalized social labeling and sorting mechanism* that places everyone into either the male/man or female/woman category (Bilodeau, 2009) ignores the fluidity of gender. Participants described how their identities were always questioned, made invisible, and ultimately denied. The policing of the participants' gender would not be as effective were it not for the second characteristic, described as the *disordering and punishing those who did not conform* to the norms of the gender binary. Those who do not conform experience accountability across campus spaces, including in classrooms, employment, residence halls, and bathrooms, such as being accused of being in the 'wrong' bathroom when they either are in the appropriate bathroom or an appropriate one does not exist. The disordering is inherent in the discourse of 'passing', a vehicle of assimilation of trans* people into the

gender binary (Bernstein Sycamore, 2010), whereby those who ‘succeed’ in presenting themselves as normative do not experience the same level of scrutiny and violence as those who ‘fail’ at doing gender right, which intimately ties together the second and third characteristics of genderism. The *overt and covert privileging of binary gender identities* showed up even within trans* and LGBTQ communities. For some of the study’s participants their passing privilege also gave them a new reality to grapple with - access to male privilege when they were perceived as (cisgender) men. The final characteristic of genderism is the *isolation of gender nonconforming identities and people* rendering them invisible and inaccessible. The lack of visible trans* people had an impact on the participants’ abilities to describe their identities and experiences to others and themselves, furthering their own isolation and cyclically reinforcing trans* people’s invisibility. Intersecting with hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005), genderism within trans* communities often appears as intra-community issues. These often show up around physical transition and trans* authenticity, such as whether someone who does not desire hormone replacement therapy is really trans* or if someone presenting in a binary manner is ‘trans* enough’ (Hines, 2006; Roen, 2002). These tensions around the role of transition in determining one’s gender or authenticity as a trans* person are also raced and classed, if for no other reason than for the limited access to transition-related health care (Gehi & Arkles, 2007).

The importance of this study cannot be understated as it was the first to investigate the systematic way that trans* students experience oppression, specifically genderism, in higher education. The study’s participant pool was diverse in many ways,

including both graduate and undergraduate students from a variety of majors, with varying gender and sexual identities, from different socio-economic backgrounds, and at different transition stages and desires. However, the lack of any trans* students of color and the invisibility of trans* students with disabilities in the study is a concern and call to investigate the role and characteristics of genderism as experienced by trans* students of color and trans* students with disabilities, including how racism, ableism, and other systems of oppression intersect with genderism (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Andersen & Collins, 2013; Gerschick, 2008; Landry, 2007).

Framing the Context

The social and institutional context that hegemonic masculinity and genderism construct is both framed and challenged through the lenses of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991, 2003), disidentification (Muñoz, 1999), critical trans politics (Spade, 2011), and theory as liberatory practice (hooks, 1994). In varying degrees, these lenses draw from critical race theory, Black feminist thought, queer theory, critical disability studies, and other resistance frameworks. Thus this section also subsumes the lessons and tenets of post-structuralism through the above mentioned lenses.

Rooted in Black feminist thought and activism that can be traced back to anti-slavery (Springer, 2002), intersectionality was conceptualized by the Combahee River Collective (1981), and later named by Kimberle Crenshaw (1991, 2003). It was advanced by Black women who experienced marginalization in both the anti-racist civil rights movement and the women's liberation movement. It is an analytical tool that seeks to name and deconstruct the interlocked nature of systems of oppression. In its infancy

intersectionality was primarily used to centralize the experiences of Black women within the legal realm and thus focused on the interlocking natures of racism and sexism, with reference to classism. The evolution and repurposing of the theory has led to its utility in a variety of disciplines, including higher education, and the inclusion of additional systems of oppression such as heterosexism, ableism, and genderism (Abes, 2009; Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Andersen & Collins, 2013; Renn, 2010). A historically contextualized understanding of oppression described:

“intersectionality” as signifying the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis [sic] of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts. The concept emphasizes that different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands. (Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p. 76)

Intersectionality and women of color feminism as frameworks are integral to queer of color analysis such as Muñoz’s (1999) theorization of disidentification. Disidentification relies on the “multiplicity of interlocking identity components and the ways in which they affect the social” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 8), thus “debunk[ing] the idea that race, class, gender, and sexuality are discrete formations... insulated from one another” (Ferguson, 2004, p. 4). It is the disruption of normative narratives of belonging that situate individuals as either aligning with and conforming to dominant ideologies and ways of being (“identification” or good) or in active opposition (“counter-identification” or bad). To disidentify, according to Muñoz (1999), is a political act of resistance which produces a new reality rather than reifying reality by either adopting it or opposing it entirely. Muñoz (1999) centered the performances of queer people of color to describe the politics of disidentification as an agentic practice that contests “social subordination

through the project of worldmaking” (p. 200) and the creation of new truths and realities. Culture is thus seen a locale where individuals are compelled to negotiate and make decisions around their relationship with state-promoted cultural artifacts, meanings, and values (Ferguson, 2004).

The evolution of the term *brown boi* (Bailey, 2014) is an example of disidentification. This community of masculine of center people of color, through acknowledging the structural power of masculinity and employing self-love and gender-transformative learning, seeks to “reimagine healthy masculinities” (p. 46). Masculine of center refers to people of any gender who embody and identify with masculinity in some way. The creation of disidentifying spaces is also exemplified by organizations such as Theta Xi Theta Fraternity, Inc. Formed initially to provide a mentorship avenue for masculine of center women, the organization disrupts the often White heterosexual cisgender male domain of fraternity life, while utilizing and identifying with common fraternal symbols and tenets such as colors, emblems, brotherhood, and service (Theta Xi Theta Fraternity, Inc., 2014). In this way, the fraternity “use[s] the code [of the majority] as raw material for representing a disempowered politics of positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 5). It is a rethinking rather than a discarding of categories such as fraternity, brotherhood, and masculine (Ferguson, 2004).

Outlining disidentification as a political survival tool that is especially useful for queer (including trans*) people with multiple marginalized identities, comes to focus when examined from a critical trans politics (Spade, 2011) lens. Critical trans politics

fundamentally challenges mainstream assumptions of neutrality in institutional structures, as well as that policy reform alone can create the systemic and paradigmatic changes needed to improve the lives of trans* people. In reality, administratively determined identity categories – such as gender – put people who do not fit into the state’s understood conceptions of those categories in risk of invisibility, hypervisibility, lack of access to necessary resources, harassment, violence, and death. Spade (2011) argued that administrative systems, such as higher education institutions, do not merely sort seemingly naturally occurring categories, but are rather responsible for the constant reproductions of their meanings, their boundaries, and their vulnerabilities. On college campuses, one of the many ways gender is administered is in how gender is coded in a student’s or employee’s records and through what mechanisms one is able to change that coding. Often merely declaring one’s identity is not enough, and campus gender change policies dictate what one must do to evidence their claimed gender, which places the institution as arbiter of gender identities (Beemyn, 2014). As little can be done on a college campus without the production of a student or staff ID (e.g., access to events, rosters, dining halls), trans* students are vulnerable to misidentification, inability or unwillingness to access resources, and potentially dangerous disclosures. The limitations of assimilationist strategies of seeking equality and inclusion (Ahmed, 2012) – what Muñoz (1999) would describe as “identification” – maintain “stratifying social and economic arrangements” (Spade, 2011, p. 14). This further harms and oppresses those with multiple marginalized identities, such as gender non-conforming trans* people of color with limited financial resources, by creating dichotomies of good (those who fit into

administered categories) and bad (those who for a myriad of reasons do not) trans* people. Spade (2011) suggested that a far more transformative approach that moves “beyond the politics of recognition and inclusion” (p. 28) is needed to attend to the most urgent needs of all trans* people.

The lenses discussed thus far push for the examination and critique of the (re)production of intersecting systems of power and the pursuit of transformative theory that aims to enact practice for liberation (hooks, 1994). “Theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary” (hooks, 1994, p. 61), thus we must intentionally ask it to do so and create theory that shifts our daily lives. It is not enough to ask whether masculinity can include trans* representations of masculinity, but rather how trans* realities and conceptions might transform masculinities, how we think about them, value them, and enact them. Collective critical reflection informed by feminist and transfeminist thinking (Enke, 2012; hooks, 1994) is necessary to understand how patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity (in collusion with genderism, racism, ableism, heterosexism, and classism) can shape trans*masculinity and how that can be resisted.

Framed Personally

As a trans*masculine person of color who entered the field of higher education emboldened by experiences in student activism, I am partial to scholarship that seeks to name and destabilize systems of oppression and taken-for-granted constructs. Current conceptions of gender in particular, but always in relation to and fused with other social statuses, do not account for conceptions and experiences like my own and those of other trans* people, including within higher education. The exclusion of our multi-faceted

realities shapes the oppressive landscape of these institutions and has an impact on the matriculation, persistence, success, and well-being of trans* people within and beyond its bounds. This study is motivated by a desire to reimagine that landscape by unveiling the landscape's current state and recognizing its severe limitations.

Masculinities in Higher Education

This section of the literature review examines the influences and shapers of masculinity, its various consequences, including gender role conflict, and the diversity of masculinities explored in higher education. The lack of distinctions made between manhood and masculinity affected the review of this literature, as the two were often conflated and used interchangeably in unnuanced ways. Even when distinctions were made, they were linked in ways that excluded masculinities not tied to men, such as the following quote: “manhood is about meanings men construct about themselves as men, and masculinity is about the related behaviours (sic), demonstrations, and performances that emerge from manhood constructions” (Dancy, 2011, p. 478). This review attempts to identify when it is clear whether masculinity or manhood was investigated, when it was not, and when they were being discussed in inseparable tandem to demonstrate how and when masculinity is essentialized as a cisgender men's-only construct.

Hegemonic Masculinity

The acquisition of masculinity is a social process, something that is achieved rather than merely ascribed (Connell, 2005), thus requiring continuous enactment or performance for the purposes of validation, most importantly from other men (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2004; Kimmel, 2010). Connected to patriarchy and gender power

structures, hegemonic masculinity is “the pattern of practice... that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832).

Connell’s (2005) notion of a hegemonic masculinity names its dominance over women, as well as subordinated masculinities that do not meet patriarchal standards.

An overview of hegemonic masculinity was offered in this study’s conceptual framework, thus it is not explored deeply here, but rather quickly revisited. Hegemonic masculinity is an invisible and ubiquitous force maintained and reconstructed by all genders’ continued performance of normative gendered practices and behaviors (Brookfield, 2005; Butler, 2004; Connell, 2005; Kimmel & Davis, 2011; Wagner, 2011), such as in the glorification of masculinity and derisions of femininity by gay men on hook-up apps (Shuckerow, 2014). Despite the recognition of a plurality of masculinities (e.g., Aboim, 2010; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Harper & Harris, 2010; Laker & Davis, 2011; Person, 2006), not all are considered authentic or desirable (Wagner, 2011).

Constructed both in relation to femininities and to divergent and subordinated masculinities, hegemonic masculinity is a patriarchal ideology that ‘others’, subjugates, and dominates femininities and non-hegemonic masculinities. Masculine is constructed to mean being assertive, independent, rational, strong, and successful, qualities that come with power and status, and in opposition to feminine qualities of being passive, submissive, emotional, weak, and nurturing (Berila, 2011; Courtenay, 2000; Golombok & Fivush, 1994; Street, Kimmel, & Kromrey, 1995). College men associated masculinity with respect, integrity, confidence, responsibility, character, and physical prowess (Harris, 2008, 2010). These associations are temporal and contextual, and what is

considered feminine or hegemonic masculine or marginal masculine change, but the existence of hegemony itself – the dominance of one hegemonic masculinity over all others ideologically, culturally, and institutionally – remains (Connell, 2005). This dominance is supported by a shared belief of the hegemonic form’s superiority (Connell, 2005) and the intersecting cultures of entitlement, silence, and protection (Kimmel, 2008).

Influencers and Shapers of Masculinity

The three intersecting cultures of entitlement, silence, and protection maintain the construction of learned masculine scripts (Kimmel & Davis, 2011; Mahalik, Good, & Englar-Carlson, 2010; O’Neil, Helms, Gable, David, & Wrightsman, 2010), which are produced and reproduced in interactions with societal and institutional expectations and other people (Harris & Harper, 2010). These scripts or messages of what it means to be a man and to be masculine are taught to boys from early on by peers, parents, media, and other authority figures such as teachers, coaches, and religious leaders (Bem, 1981; Courtenay, 2011; Kimmel & Davis, 2011). The omnipresence of the messages and their tutors is such that many may not consciously recall them or a time when they did not know their expected roles (Edwards & Jones, 2009). This socialization continues in adulthood, molding the already constructed “boy code” (Pollack, 1999) into a fairly similar “guy code” (Kimmel, 2008). These codes are sets of unwritten, but well known rules such as “boys don’t cry,” “it’s better to be mad than sad,” “take it like a man,” and “it’s all good.” Sticking to the code requires men to not show emotions, compassion, or weakness, and maintain that they are in charge and everything is okay. In higher

education, the teachers of masculinity are (typically or at least assumed cisgender) male authority figures and peers, media and society, and sports and competition (Tatum & Charlton, 2008). They aid in the expansion of these codes and expectations that become increasingly restrictive in adulthood (Edwards & Jones, 2009). Women did not show up as significant influencers in the construction of college men's masculinity in the aforementioned studies.

Investigating college men's conceptions of masculinity, Harris (2010) solicited the input of 68 undergraduate men at a large private urban institution in the western United States. The sample was purposefully selected to be diverse by class year, race (two-thirds were students of color), sexuality (almost 20% were gay or bisexual), and socioeconomic status. Fifteen students were involved in varsity athletics and 15 were members of fraternities. This diverse grouping of men conceptualized masculinity to encompass "being respected," "being confident and self-assured," "assuming responsibility" and "embodying physical prowess" (p. 305).

Precollege gender socialization was influenced predominantly by parents, other men, and participation in "masculine" activities, whereas these conceptions were influenced in higher education by the campus culture, campus involvement, and interactions with other men (Harris, 2010). Study participants described the campus culture as competitive and patriarchal, as well as diverse. The latter allowed some of the men freedom to express divergent masculinities, however, the patriarchal and competitive aspects of the culture maintained the dominance of hegemonic masculinities, which many associated with fraternity members and student-athletes. Campus involvement was

characterized with the association of leadership as a masculine endeavor and the expectation that organizations are led by men, perceptions that are still held regarding leadership (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). Some students also shared how campus involvement exposed them to men different than themselves, expanding their conceptualization of masculinity. Lastly, Harris (2010) substantiated the impact of men's interactions with each other in dictating speech, behavior, and understandings of masculinity. Participants had hyper-sexual and disrespectful discussions about women with other men that some did not approve of, but participated in anyway, constrained by the three intersecting cultures discussed by Kimmel (2008). The study situated collegiate settings as both liberating and oppressive, maintaining hegemonic masculinity through privileging its embodiments even as it exposes students to diverse and divergent masculinities (Harris, 2010; Stockdill & Danico, 2012).

As hegemonic masculinity requires everyone's contribution or complicity to its maintenance and hold on power (Connell, 2005), heterosexual women also play a role. In a study exploring how feminist identity shapes women's desired traits in men as romantic partners, Backus and Mahalik (2011) found that women who scored lower on a feminist identity scale desired more traditionally masculine men. This inverse relationship was found to be significant, although the pattern was not consistent across the masculine norms. For example, neither women who strongly supported feminist values nor those who did not found the masculine norms of "violence" and "playboy" as desirable. Also, neither grouping of women found "disdain for homosexuals" particularly undesirable, implying perhaps that heterosexism was present even for

feminist-leaning women. The researchers acknowledged the limitations of focusing on heterosexual, mostly White women in a private institution in this study. However, there was still an underlying assumption that to measure desirability of masculinity norms, one has to explore attraction to men, ignoring the existence of and attractions to female and trans* masculinities (Halberstam, 1998, 1999), thus conflating sex, gender identity, and gender expression. This conceptually, if not practically, emboldens the links between compulsory heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity (Berila, 2011; Connell, 2005).

For most men, other men are stronger influencers of what masculinity entails than women (Gottfried, as cited in Berkowitz, 2011; Harris, 2010). Thus, men-only communities and spaces, such as sports teams, fraternities, and some residence halls are particularly prone to adopting and promoting a hegemonic masculine culture, including compulsory heterosexuality, heterosexism, and the degradation of women (Harris & Barone, 2011; Katz, 2006; Kimmel, 2008; Kimmel & Messner, 2004; Kivel, 1992; Rhoads, 1995). Gay and bisexual men, as well as trans* students often feel ostracized, unsafe, or excluded from fraternal spaces, even when they create Greek organizations geared specifically for their communities due to overarching heterosexism and genderism in fraternal culture (Hinrichs & Rosenberg, 2008; Nicolazzo, 2011). The presence of gay and bisexual men in fraternities conflict with organizational concerns of constructing an implied heterosexual masculine identity for recruitment purposes (Hall & LaFrance, 2007), while the existence of organizations such as Theta Xi Theta Fraternity, Inc. (2014) fundamentally question who gets to embody masculinity and form associations around it.

Similar to fraternities, sports teams function as male-only spaces that promote hegemonic masculinity through compulsory heterosexuality. The (re)production and pervasiveness of compulsory heterosexuality as part and parcel with masculinity in boys' and men's sports is well documented (e.g., Anderson, 2005; Connell, 2005; Messner, 1992). In an examination of 30 years of research on masculinities in sports, Anderson (2011) contended that the shifting narratives and presence of gay athletes and less-than-hostile heterosexual athletes provided cause for pause to "account for... *decreased* cultural homophobia" (p. 569; author's own emphasis), and calling into question the utility of hegemonic masculinity theory. His critique however assumes hegemony to be a static entity, rather than a dynamic one that responds to threats to its power by shifting and adopting to temporal conceptions to maintain its dominance (Gramsci, as cited in Connell, 2005). Among the examples Anderson (2011) anecdotally utilized to make his case was that more men appeared to wear pink, a color associated with femininity. However, he failed to ascertain how much of that act is also protected by common memes like "real men wear pink" that assures the wearer and his audience of his continued virile masculinity, a situating of the act of wearing pink as masculine rather than an understanding and challenging of hegemonic masculinity. He also failed to ask which men could wear pink and not fear association with femininity or queerness, and thus emasculation or violence. After all, men who have already established their masculinity – often class and race privileged – are sometimes allowed a little reprieve, when those who have not must continue to perform (Connell, 2005).

Anderson's (2011) critique also ignores the possibility of agency exerted by individuals or groups to alter the system at the micro level (Bourdieu, 1990). This is not to minimize the efforts exerted by individuals successful in shifting how their particular team incorporates gay athletes, but instead to emphasize it. For example, it was no small feat for Michael Sam to openly declare his sexuality prior to being drafted by the National Football League and effectively becoming the NFL's first out player (Belson, 2014). However, this did not transform the NFL as a whole, as evidenced by anonymous general managers commenting that his declaration would cost him being picked (ESPN.com, 2014). Although he did end up getting picked by the St. Louis Rams, Sam has yet to play a regular season game and has since been cut by his team despite a productive preseason, signaling to at least some that the NFL is still a culturally heterosexist space (Signorile, 2014).

Men's role in shaping the definition of masculinity does not have to automate the reification of hegemonic masculinity, but can rather aid in rejecting it. Anderson (2008) examined the development of what he called inclusive masculinity in a fraternal setting. Within this particular organization, the actions of the members resisted the oft taken-for-granted connections between fraternity organizational culture and heterosexism, misogyny, sexual promiscuity and conquest, and racism. These actions included openly recruiting gay men and men of color into the organization, not accepting the use of disparaging language, and cultivating what the organization referred to as being a new age man. Davis, LaPrad, and Dixon (2011) argued that this exemplified how men's groups, such as fraternities or sports teams, can be spaces where hegemonic masculinity

is deconstructed and new, healthier, and more inclusive masculinities can be developed. However, Anderson (2008) failed to acknowledge if and how the fraternity's dominance in masculine realms, such as athletics, may have provided what Connell (2005) called a "successful claim to authority" (p. 77) that would protect its otherwise non-hegemonic displays of manhood. This critique is not to minimize the gender-liberatory potential underwritten in this case study, but rather to pose the question of whether an inclusive masculinity can only be achieved when masculinity has already been proven and thus cannot be questioned. Thus, Anderson's (2008, 2011) insistence in his work that inclusive masculinity theory is an adequate critique of the present utility and prominence of hegemonic masculinity underscores a misunderstanding of the dynamism and constant ideological reproduction of hegemony, maintaining hegemonic masculinity as a useful framework (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Consequences: Gender Role Conflict and Its Impact

In addition to examining what shapes masculinity, hegemonic masculinity has been framed to also examine its impacts. The consequences of hegemonic masculinity's emphasis of toughness and self-reliance include aggression and violence, alcohol and substance abuse, homophobia, risky sexual behavior, and other health concerns (O'Neil, 1981, 2008; O'Neil, Helms, Gable, David, & Wrightsman, 1986; 2010; Pleck, 1995). The gender roles that men are socialized into within hegemonic masculinity are often restrictive, and lead to devaluing or violating oneself or others. This psychological state is known as gender role conflict (GRC) and ultimately undermines one's full human potential (O'Neil, 1990). Fear of femininity – specifically the fear of being perceived as

feminine – and hegemonic masculinity are central to gender role conflict (Davis, 2002; Harper & Barone, 2011; Kimmel & Davis, 2011). However, what is considered feminine and thus feared or rejected is not universal. Working class men for example may view intellectual labor as opposed to manual labor as feminine, and thus invest less in succeeding academically (Archer, Pratt, & Phillips, 2001).

The four patterns of traditional masculine role based on GRC are: (a) success, power, and competition; (b) restrictive emotionality; (c) restrictive sexual and affectionate behavior between men; and (d) conflict between work and family relations (O’Neil, 1981, 2008; O’Neil et al., 1986). GRC can manifest internally as private and personal “devaluations, restrictions, and violations” (O’Neil, 2008, p. 363). These result in lower regard and status, the controlling of behavior and expressions, as well as psychological and physical injury, all imposed on self and/or others. Externally, GRC can be expressed towards others or experienced from others, and similarly cause harm. Finally GRC may also be experienced due to gender role transitions, usually life events, such as matriculating into college, that challenge or change one’s self-assumptions, and may be positive or negative.

GRC contributes to destructive and violent behavior frequently observed in college men, such as substance abuse, high-risk sex, sexual aggression and assault, heterosexist and sexist harassment and violence, dating violence, and other forms of abuse and aggression (Harper, Harris, & Mmeje, 2005; Harris, 2010; Harris & Barone, 2011; O’Neil, 2008). Harris and Barone (2011) argued that these behaviors often act as vehicles through which men gain the desired meaningful relationships with each other.

They suggested that these are substitutes for vulnerability and openness with each other, which men cannot evoke out of fear of being characterized as feminine. The described behaviors are also often in conflict with individual men's espoused values, yet they partake in them (Harris, 2008, 2010), demonstrating the powerful impact of hegemonic masculinity. The fear of the feminine, the code of silence, and restrictions on emotionality not only lead to the aforementioned behaviors, but can also impede the development of empathy and relatability necessary for college men to develop social justice attitudes and actions towards others, particularly women, gay and bisexual men, and trans* people (Davis & Wagner, 2005). These obstacles are greater in all-male settings such as fraternities, contributing to fraternity houses only lagging behind on campus housing where men are most likely to rape or sexually assault women (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000).

The aforementioned inability to be vulnerable with each other and the ever-present fear of femininity was evident in Davis' (2002) study. The former was most evident in the study participants' communication codes as they played out with other men or with women. The participants felt they could be vulnerable and expressive with women in ways they could not be with other men. Whereas they could be open and direct with women, any affection expressed to or with men was done either nonverbally or in side-by-side conversations in the context of an activity such as in road trips or while playing video games. Davis (2002) failed to name the role of compulsory heterosexuality within masculinity in how the men described their relationships with women, sharing that they had to be "jerky" in order to be desirable as partners. Activities that were dubbed

feminine, such as open communication, were also tied to being perceived as gay, thus discouraging certain behaviors out of fear of being labeled either feminine or gay or both. Davis (2002) also presented the findings of this study as constructing men's identity, even though the men were homogeneously White and heterosexual, and assumingly cisgender. Although the author stated that the findings "are not intended to be representative of all men" (p. 520), Davis reified masculinity and men's identity construction from a singular dominant lens when calling for the study's application and investigation in "other" domains.

Inability to express vulnerability amplifies the dangerous relationship between hegemonic masculinity and depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and difficulties with intimacy (Kimmel & Davis, 2011). As all-men's spaces are more prone to socializing its participants to conform to hegemonic masculine ideals (Harris & Barone, 2011), these spaces also exhibit elevated rates of the aforementioned impacts. A critical review of literature examining the influences of involvement in Greek Life demonstrate strong correlations between intended or actual fraternity membership and high risk drinking, hazing, sexual aggression and coercion, and drug use, although much of the research was contained to single-institution convenience samples (Biddix, Matney, Norman, & Martin, 2014). In regards to alcohol abuse however, it has also been demonstrated that students who participate in fraternities tend to already have more prior experience with alcohol than students who do not (as cited in Biddix et al., 2014), thus selection bias ought to be taken into account.

A comprehensive literature review detailed empirical research utilizing 10 measures and scales on the correlations between masculinity constructs and men's psychological and interpersonal problems (O'Neil, 2010). These studies found statistically significant correlations between hegemonic masculinity constructs and over 58 different dependent variables. These ranged from oppressive and hostile beliefs (e.g. sexism, heterosexism, racism, ethnocentrism), substance abuse and related risky behavior such as driving while intoxicated, violence and aggression, including sexual violence, emotional problems (e.g. anger management, depression, anxiety, suicide), interpersonal issues (e.g. lack of intimacy and affection, family conflict or avoidance), and physical health concerns (e.g. neglecting preventative care, high blood pressure). The review was utilized by O'Neil and Crapser (2011) to connect GRC to student development, specifically to Chickering and Reisser's (1993) identity vectors. For example, the authors argued research demonstrating masculinity ideology's correlation with sexist and heterosexist thoughts and behaviors meant men struggle to develop mature relationships involving intimacy, trust, empathy, and acceptance (O'Neil & Crapser, 2011).

O'Neil's (2010) review is significant in comprehensively summarizing empirically documented research that demonstrates the harmful impact of hegemonic masculinity on all genders, including men. The review acts as a call to action to higher education institutions to intervene and address masculinity-related constructs programmatically and institutionally to better serve their students holistically. However, the review does not include or mention qualitative research, which would contribute the

voices and narratives of students and deepen the understanding and power of GRC and its impacts (Merriam, 2009).

Informed interventions in higher education require examinations of hegemonic masculinity's role in informing and restricting college men's gender identity development. This role is what Edwards and Jones (2009) sought to investigate through the narratives of 10 men, all traditionally college-aged. The men were all involved on campus in various organizations, and came from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. Six of the men were White, two were African American, one was Latino, and another was Asian Indian. Two of them were also identified as gay, with one identified as trans*. The latter's trans* identity was not explored, a missed opportunity to examine masculinity through a trans* perspective.

The men in the study spoke to the performance of masculinity, whether reflecting on themselves or others, as a mask disguising their true selves and the ways they did not meet societal expectations (Edwards & Jones, 2009). This often meant doing or saying things they did not want to, such as making homophobic jokes, drinking too much, and hooking up, in order to fit in with other men. Even as some of the men developed their own internal definitions of manhood, they constantly had to contend with the external pressures of hegemonic masculinity. These performances of masculinity had diminishing impacts on their relationships with women, other men, and their own self-conceptions. Keeping up the mask meant degrading women and having unfulfilling sexual relationships with them. The ability to be vulnerable and build relationships with other men were limited due to restrictive emotionality, competition among men, and

homophobia. Critical incidents ranging from experiencing rape or abuse to being in meaningful relationships, as well as reflective opportunities acted as catalysts for several of the men to question hegemonic masculinity and craft their own identity, albeit with ongoing setbacks.

These performances of masculinity can have differential impacts on different communities of men, as they are constructed and policed differently. Within the context of a dominant hegemonic masculinity, this requires some men to have to balance the performing of more than one masculinity publicly. In a study examining conceptions of Black masculinity in college men, Ford (2011) found that this act of masculine code-switching affected the students' self-image and mental well-being. The internalization of racist messaging of Black masculinity (described further in the next section) fostered body image issues and emotional distress. It also required the men to enact inauthentic interactions in order to maintain the classed and raced image of a "thug" as exemplar of Black masculinity. This highlights how studies that explore masculinity and GRC from a homogeneous lens (i.e. White, heterosexual, cisgender, middle class) or rely strictly on quantitative measures, miss nuanced differential impacts of these constructs on various communities, and in so doing reify its hegemony.

Diverse and Divergent Masculinities

Hegemonic masculinity is socio-politically defined as White, middle class, and heterosexual (Connell, 2005). Within dominant White culture, there are numerous submasculinities, often revolving around conceptions of race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality. This is evident in higher education research on masculinities as most studies

utilized a homogeneous participant pool and indicated a need for future studies involving queer men, men of color, men with disabilities, and so forth. Harris and Barone (2011) argued that this practice centers White heterosexual able-bodied cisgender men's masculinities, making all others an "afterthought" (p. 50) to or "derivative of" (Edwards & Jones, 2009, p. 216) the dominant narrative. Thus, masculinities are worthy of nuanced investigation within particular social and institutional locations (Harper, Wardell, & McGuire, 2011), even as they are contextualized within dominant hegemony. In the case of Black masculinity, for example, Harper (1996) does not analyze Black masculinity as entirely separate from, rather in constant relationship with the broader U.S. context and culture in which it resides.

In addition to being an intellectual afterthought, the centrality of a particular hegemonic masculinity within higher education means that divergent masculinities do not belong. In a study investigating racially diverse working class men's participation or non-participation in UK higher education, Archer et al. (2001) drew out the participants' masculinity discourses to reflect on their rejection of and conflicts within higher education. Building on previous literature that positioned higher education masculinity "as incompatible with notions of working-class masculinity" (p. 435), their study revealed higher education masculinity to be undesirable, socially inept, and ultimately not masculine for these men.

The working-class men's desires to reassert their version of heterosexual hegemonic masculinity involved socializing in peer groups, "mucking about," and "running the school" (p. 436), or "being cool" (p. 439) in the case of Black working-class

students, as some participants described (Archer et al., 2011). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) would describe this as a “protest masculinity,” one that “embodies the claim to power typical of hegemonic masculinities... but which lacks... economic and institutional authority” (p. 848). These practices took energy and time away from investing in academic endeavors, and ultimately led to not participating in higher education, thus working against their own interests (Harper, 1996, p. xi). For White working-class men that did participate, motivation lay in maintaining working class masculine ideals of working hard and making a better living (Archer et al., 2011). For working-class students of color, it was the attainment of a middle-class identity and the prestige that comes with middle-class jobs that propelled them to participate, which they described as leading to losing working-class masculinities. Whether working-class men participated in higher education or not, their experiences and perceptions of masculinities in higher education were deeply classed and often in conflict with their own masculinities.

The distinction between “soft” and “hard” masculinities was also present for Black college men, with “soft” college masculinity in contention with “hard” Black masculinity (Dancy, 2011). His study drew 24 participants from six historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and six historically White institutions (HWIs), all members of the same Black fraternity, but otherwise diverse in other identities, such as sexualities and socioeconomic status. He found that both at HWIs and HBCUs participants were plagued by the negative expectations and stereotypes of White people on or off campus in constructing their masculinities to stand in opposition to those

expectations, such as through their attempts to be “proper” and appear “good” (p. 489).

The reality of this double consciousness meant many students discussed coping with internal struggles in conceptualizing their masculinities and manhood, and seeking to move beyond others’ expectations. This exemplifies the particular tension around constructing a Black masculinity for the purposes of or in reaction to a White gaze, making Black women and non-masculine individuals less relevant to the construction of a Black identity, further perpetuating masculine hierarchy and power (Harper, 1996).

In another study on Black masculinity, Ford (2011) found there to be less of a focus on an external White gaze, but rather more on an intra-community pressure of *doing* Black masculinity, likely an internalization of the White gaze itself. The language of *doing* versus *being* was how participants distinguished between masculinity and manhood in a Black context. The study included 29 Black men at a small private PWI, with a diversity of class years, religions, socioeconomic statuses, sexualities, hometown racial makeups, majors, and campus involvement represented. Participants described Black masculinity as a heteronormative façade, “a contrived tough, thuglike exterior that does not allow room for emotional vulnerability” (Ford, 2011, p. 44). Black masculinity was associated with having an athletic body, intimidating presence, and access to money and women, and it was a group policed in primarily Black settings of the campus. The image of the thug was a personified ideal of Black masculinity and drew from racialized and racist images of Black men in popular media. *Not doing* Black masculinity included (a) gay, bisexual, and other non-heterosexual identities being perceived as in conflict with masculinity, (b) being a “sellout” (p. 49) by having lighter skin, living in the suburbs and

attaining middle class status, and not employing a Black vernacular, and (c) by being a “pretty boy” (p. 50), which matched White Western standards of beauty. Thus, non-heterosexuality, mixed heritage and “passing” become contributors to the feminization of Blackness and has cultural and political implications (Harper, 1996). Participants distinguished these acts of doing (or not doing) masculinity from *being* a Black man, which they described as a more internal process that involved more authentic interactions both publicly and privately, and could only be achieved after college and maturation due to experiencing major life events.

These differential conceptions of masculinities ought to be understood as “not neatly attached to... men’s bodies” (Berila, 2011, p. 98), intersecting with other identities in various social settings. Gay, bisexual, queer, and trans* men may experiment with and perform different masculinities for a variety of reasons, such as to connect with the campus queer community, to conform with prescribed norms to fit in, as forms of resistance, to forge their own identity, to avoid conflict or marginalization, or to position themselves within the greater campus culture (Berila, 2011). However, Berila (2011) failed to acknowledge that these experiments and performances also engage femininities, sometimes simultaneously, and thus failed to disembody masculinity from men, and femininity from women, even as she attempted to detach those constructs from gendered bodies and identities.

Men’s bodies as markers of masculinity act as a stigmatizing and emasculating connection for those constructing identity at the intersection of masculinity and disability. The attributions of activity, athletic and sexual prowess, mental agility, and independence

to masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) make the attainment and performance of masculinity seem unrealistic for people with disabilities, particularly mobility-related ones (Gerschick, 2011). The connection between seeking help, demonstrating vulnerability or weakness and femininity furthers the chasm between disability and masculinity, which may deter men with disabilities from acknowledging needs on campus (Gerschick, 2011; Mahalik et al., 2011), or to overcompensate by enacting patriarchal behaviors (Wienke, 1998). Unfortunately, the higher education literature is greatly lacking in this arena leaving this to conjecture.

Exploring the embodiment of masculinity at identity intersections also complicates what one might perceive as a performance of conformity, resistance, or disidentification (Muñoz, 1999), depending on how a study is approached. The use of multiple frameworks to analyze the narrative of an undergraduate student at the intersections of his racial, sexual, gender, class, academic, and spiritual identities elicited some of these perception (Harper, Wardell, & McGuire, 2011). Using Abes and Kasch's (2007) concept of queer-authorship for example, shed light on the student's construction of his masculinity and sexuality within a fraternity. The student, Tyson, resisted heteronormative understandings of what gay men's masculinity (or perceived lack thereof) looks like, eliciting his brothers' comfort with him as an individual, with a desire to shift their overall misconceptions of gay men later. He also balanced contextualized performativity (Butler, 2004), or "playing to situational expectations" (p. 91) as he described it, with showing up as his full complex self, thus continuously constructing and deconstructing masculinity in relationship with his other identities and changing contexts.

While Tyson resisted what he believed were restricted definitions of gay masculinity, other gay men might instead resist the restrictions on masculinity by distancing themselves from it (e.g. Edwards & Jones, 2009). Either of those acts of resistance can be inversely read as conformity; Tyson conforming to hegemonic masculinity, the others conforming to stereotypes of gay men not being masculine. As the researchers in each case allowed for the participants to author their own narrative, both realities are able to exist as forms of resistance, as ways to come to one's own self-definition of gay or queer masculinity.

Conclusions

Literature on masculinities in higher education is still relatively new and thus sparse, albeit growing in popularity and prominence. In its evolution it has begun to chip away at the normalization of men's identities and experiences by exploring what masculine identity development looks like, with various studies disaggregating the assumingly heterogeneous moniker of 'man', and through the use of feminist frameworks (Connell, 2005; Harper & Harris, 2010; Laker & Davis, 2011). These studies have created a foundational perspective upon which further transformative scholarship can be built.

Thus far, research on masculinity/ies in higher education are saturated with the narratives of White heterosexual cisgender men (Harris & Barone, 2011), perpetuating a hegemonic definition of masculinity as a construct (Connell, 2005). Additionally, the framing of masculinity/ies as men's issues, ignores the systematic nature of hegemonic masculinity, wherein people of all genders and all social institutions contribute to its

maintenance and dominance (Harris & Barone, 2011; Laker, 2011). Furthermore, this framing conflates sex, gender identity, and gender expression whereby male (assigned at birth) equals (cisgender) man equals masculine/masculinity. This is evidenced by studies that purport to investigate masculinities actually being about men exclusively, and supported by essentialist leanings of O'Neil (2010), whose work on GRC is the basis of a bulk of the higher education literature on masculinities. Men's identity development becomes synonymous with masculine identity development, which is not exclusively men's milieu (Berila, 2011; Halberstam, 1998, 1999).

In addition to maintaining the gender binary and excluding other-gendered masculine voices, this limits possibilities to transform and destabilize hegemonic masculinity, at the center of praxis for organizations like the Brown Boi Project (Bailey, 2014; Brown Boi Project, 2012). Similarly not all self-identified men identify as masculine or embody masculinity, thus the incongruence of their gender identity and expression appears as a failure in masculinity development rather than a rejection of it or a desire for something else. No studies investigating college men's femininities or androgyny for example was found or even called for as worthy of exploring.

The study at hand extends the literature by investigating masculinity from a trans*masculine perspective, thus destabilizing the essentialist nature in which masculinity is conceptualized in higher education. Furthermore, the study remains open to how masculinity is understood and experienced by trans*masculine students in relation to femininities and feminine people, including their own femininity/ies. The study also adds to trans* student literature in higher education, which is explored in the next section.

Trans* Students in Higher Education

The increased visibility of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, and queer (LGBTQ) students on college campuses has led to the expansion of related literature in higher education publications, particularly examining identity development, surveying campus climate, and sharing personal narratives (Renn, 2010). However, much of that work either does not include trans* students or uncritically aggregates them with the whole LGBTQ population, assuming trans* students' needs and experiences to be similar to those of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) students and making little to no distinctions between sexual orientation and gender identity (Marine, 2011; Pusch, 2003; Renn & Reason, 2013). This practice is not useful, particularly when LGB/LGBTQ campus organizations and centers, often sources of LGBTQ study participants, have not always been supportive or inclusive (Beemyn, 2003; Bilodeau, 2009) with the 'T' in the acronym being "more symbolic than substantive" (Beemyn, 2003, p. 34). Some would even characterize these spaces to be trans* exclusionary, with trans* people's contributions to LGBTQ advocacy and activism often overlooked or marginalized (Marine, 2011), a result of homonormativity (Stryker, 2008b). Homonormativity is the practice of adopting heteronormative ideals in the mainstream gay community, such as adopting or not resisting the binary gender system and its related norms. In the following section, the experiences of trans* students is first contextualized within genderism, as well as the policy landscape of higher education. This section reviews the literature on trans* students' experiences with campus climate, as well as what campus involvement, leadership, and identity development looks like for trans* students.

Genderism in Higher Education

Genderism – sometimes also referred to as cissexism or cisgenderism – is a cultural and systemic ideology that assumes and regulates gender as a binary that is essentialized and based on sex assignment at birth, pathologizing and denigrating gender identities that do not conform (Bilodeau, 2009; Lennon & Mistler, 2014; Wilchins, 2004). Genderism impacts everyone, but has a particularly oppressing, violent, and daily presence in trans* people's lives navigating institutional structures and processes that administrate gender within a narrow and polarized binary (Spade, 2011a). As a result of a two-year qualitative research study focused on 10 trans* students' experiences at two large Midwestern research intensive institutions, Bilodeau (2009) discovered that genderism presented four characteristics within higher educational institutions.

The first characteristic described the documenting and classifying practices of gender by administrative agencies that determine one's gender based predominantly on one's sex assigned at birth (Spade, 2011a), such as when a trans*masculine student is placed in housing reserved for female students. This *institutionalized social labeling and sorting mechanism* that places everyone into either the male/man or female/woman category (Bilodeau, 2009) ignores the fluidity of gender. Participants described how their identities were always questioned, made invisible, and ultimately denied. The policing of the participants' gender would not be as effective were it not for the second characteristic, described as the *disordering and punishing those who did not conform to the norms of the gender binary*. Those who do not conform experience accountability across campus spaces, including in classrooms, employment, residence halls, and

bathrooms. The disordering is inherent in the discourse of ‘passing’, a vehicle of assimilation of trans* people into the gender binary (Bernstein Sycamore, 2010), whereby those who ‘succeed’ in presenting themselves as normative do not experience the same level of scrutiny and violence as those who ‘fail’ at doing gender right, which intimately ties together the second and third characteristics of genderism. The *overt and covert privileging of binary gender identities* showed up even within trans* and LGBTQ communities. For some of the study’s participants their passing privilege also gave them a new reality to grapple with - access to male privilege when they were perceived as (cisgender) men. The final characteristic of genderism is the *isolation of gender nonconforming identities and people* rendering them invisible and inaccessible. The lack of visible trans* people had an impact on the participants’ abilities to describe their identities and experiences to others and themselves, furthering their own isolation and cyclically reinforcing trans* people’s invisibility.

The importance of Bilodeau’s (2009) study cannot be understated as it was the first to investigate the systematic way that trans* students experience oppression, specifically genderism, in higher education. The study’s participant pool was diverse in many ways, including both graduate and undergraduate students from a variety of majors, with varying gender and sexual identities, and at different transition stages and desires. However, the lack of any trans* students of color in the study is a concern and call to investigate the role and characteristics of genderism as experienced by trans* students of color, including how racism and other systems of oppression intersect with genderism (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Andersen & Collins, 2013; Landry, 2007).

The Campus Climate for Trans* Students

Genderism underlies institutional policies and practices (Bilodeau, 2009), as well as the “current attitudes, behaviors, and standards of employees and students... that concern the access for, inclusion of, and level of respect for individual and group needs, abilities, and potential” (Rankin & Reason, 2008, p. 264). Genderism creates a challenging campus environment for trans* students. The imbeddedness of genderism within the organizational structures of higher education (Smith, 2012) contributes to the creation and maintenance of hostile environments with damaging impact for trans* students (Chang, Milem, & Antonio, 2011). The bulk of the literature on trans* students in higher education measures and describes these environments, and suggests practices to improve them. The data sources of this literature vary, including national studies on LGBTQ campus climate (Rankin, 2004; Rankin, Blumenfeld, Weber, & Frazier, 2010), trans*-specific studies (deVries, 2012; McKinney, 2005; Morgan & Stevens, 2008; Morgan & Stevens, 2012, Seelman, Walls, Costello, Steffens, Inselman, Montague-Asp, & Colorado Trans on Campus Coalition, 2012), studies that include trans* and cisgender students (Dugan, Kusel, & Simounet, 2012; Effrig, Bieschke, & Locke, 2011), and institutional case studies (Case, Kanenberg, Erich, & Tittsworth, 2012; Hart & Lester, 2011; Lynch, 2010). Personal narratives (Howard & Stevens, 2000) add further richness. Although there are varying definitions of and ways to measure campus climate (Hart & Fellabaum, 2008), one that describes campus climate as having the three dimensions of objective, perceived, and psychological climate is used to frame this portion of the

literature review, for its incorporation of institutional policies and practices (Peterson & Spencer, 1990).

Campus policies and protocols. Petersen and Spencer (1990) suggested that campus climate is influenced by institutional policies and practices. As diversity on campus and in the U.S. continues to grow and expand, policies need to adapt accordingly (Smith, 2009). Although an accurate way to count trans* students currently does not exist, trans* identifying students are increasing on college campuses (Beemyn, 2003), with media bringing attention to their experiences in particularly gendered areas such as athletics (e.g., Griffin, 2012; Thomas, 2010), campus housing (e.g., Grasgreen, 2013), and Greek Life (e.g., Donaldson James, 2013). Campus policies have not been quick to adapt to the presence of trans* students. Out of approximately 4,600 degree granting institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012), few have policies and protocols in place to acknowledge the existence of trans* students, let alone appropriately address their needs and assure their success in higher education (Bilodeau, 2009). A recently issued Department of Education directive clarified that trans* students are protected under Title IX (Transgender Law Center, 2014), the federal law that prohibits sex-based discrimination and harassment in schools. However, it is unclear how this directive will be put into practice, particularly at the heels of another Department of Education ruling granting a religious exemption to housing trans* students on campus (Borgen, 2014).

As of June 2014, the Campus Pride Trans Policy Clearinghouse reported 736 institutions with nondiscrimination policies that include gender identity or expression.

Fifty-four institutions provide transition-related medical care coverage for students, 151 have some form of gender-inclusive housing, and 77 institutions and 47 institutions use name and gender change protocols respectively that do not require medical transition or changes in other non-campus identification. Only nine institutions thus far have a trans*-inclusive intramural athletic policy.

Spade (2011a) cautioned that inclusion in nondiscrimination policies does not necessarily lead to reductions in discrimination and harassment (Seelman et al., 2012) or changes in other policies that have more direct and daily impacts in trans* people's lives. The discrepancies in Campus Pride's (2014) reported numbers between nondiscrimination policies and all others seem to bolster Spade's (2011a) argument. He called for reform efforts to be focused instead on identification (e.g. name and gender change policies), facilities (e.g. gender-integrated housing, bathrooms, and locker rooms), and health care (e.g. trans*-inclusive and trans*-specific health care access and coverage). These are areas where trans* students confront discrimination and harassment, as well as systemic and environmental microaggressions (Hart & Lester, 2011; Lynch, 2010; McKinney, 2005; Nadal, Skolnik, & Wong, 2012; Nakamura, 1998; Negrete, 2007), contributing to trans* students' experiences and perceptions of campus climate.

Objective climate. The first dimension in Petersen and Spencer's (1990) model is the objective dimension of campus climate, which is made up of observable and quantifiable behaviors and activities. Campus climate studies that include trans* participants within larger LGBTQ studies have shown that trans* respondents experience

a more hostile climate when compared to their lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) peers (Dugan et al., 2012; Rankin, 2004; Rankin et al., 2010). In a study utilizing the responses of 1,669 students, staff, and faculty, Rankin (2004) found that compared to 28% of LGB respondents, 41% of trans* respondents experienced harassment on campus, with those who disclosed their trans* identity more openly experiencing higher rates of harassment than those who did not. Thus, those who fail to 'pass' through disclosure are more readily punished for their gender transgressions (Bilodeau, 2009). This also elucidates the role that actual and fear of harassment has in coercing trans* students to isolate themselves and make themselves invisible to others (Bilodeau, 2009; Morgan & Stevens, 2008). What little is known about trans* community college students also points to experiences of exclusionary, intimidating, or offensive behavior (38% of respondents; Rankin et al., 2010).

Rankin's (2004) study, while useful as a national study that allowed for a multi-campus outlook on the experiences of LGBTQ students and as a comparative analysis between the experiences of trans* and LGB students, is fairly limited in scope. The inclusion of almost 20% people of color within the participant pool is hopeful, however, it is unknown whether that included trans* students of color. It included only 14 public 4-year U.S. higher education institutions out of over 4,000. Additionally, all participating institutions had an LGBTQ resource center, further narrowing the context of the study, as this represented less than 3% of institutions at the time (Renn, 2010). This makes a compelling call for many more studies at different institutional types with a variety of campus resources available.

A broader study of the campus climate for LGBTQ people, included 695 (over 13%) self-identified trans* participants out of 5,149 students, staff, and faculty (Rankin et al., 2010). 75% of the 695 individuals were students. The study also broke down trans* respondents into transmasculine (TM), transfeminine (TF), or gender nonconforming (GNC), allowing for a more nuanced examination. For example, 39% of TM, 38% of TF, and 31% of GNC respondents shared that they had been harassed on campus. These figures were nearly double the numbers for cisgender respondents. Additionally, trans* respondents of color were more likely than cisgender respondents and more likely than White respondents of all gender identities to be harassed.

In a national study that included 6,450 participants from across the U.S., the largest ever study examining trans* people's experiences of discrimination, trans* college students reported being harassed (35% of respondents), physically assaulted (5%), sexually assaulted (3%), and expelled (2%; Grant, Mottet, & Tanis, 2011). Some of this violence and harassment is experienced in facilities that are structured in a binary way, such as bathrooms and residence halls (Nakamura, 1998). Compared to their cisgender peers trans* college students were 1.5 times more likely to report unwanted sexual contact and 1.5 times more likely to experience harassing, controlling, or abusive behavior (Effrig et al., 2011). When accessing survivor's assistance resources on campus, they faced hostility and uninformed staff (Seelman et al., 2012).

In addition to experiencing high rates of harassment on campus, trans* students are also severely underserved (Beemyn, 2003; Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005), particularly in regards to adequate and accessible health care (Campus Pride, 2014; Grant

et al., 2011; Lynch, 2010; McKinney, 2005; Nakamura, 1998). This includes both general health care that is administered in a trans*-competent manner, as well as trans*-affirming health care such as hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and surgery. The lack of access is exacerbated by experiences with processes and protocols that pathologize trans* students and treat their trans* identity as a mental illness (Nakamura, 1998; Seelman et al., 2012).

Perceived climate. Perceived campus climate plays as important of a role as objective climate to students' well-being and persistence. The perceived dimension of campus climate involves the image that – in this case trans* – students have of an institution and its constituents, including perceptions of policy making and institutional goals. Although perceptions may or may not be accurate, they are important to consider as they shape individual and institutional norms, in turn guiding behavior and expectations. Overall, trans* students perceive the climate on their campuses to be more hostile than their LGB peers do (Dugan et al., 2012).

In addition to actual experiences, trans* students also feared hostility, harassment, violence, and isolation (Goodrich, 2012; Rankin et al., 2010; Rogers, 2000), with 37% of TM, 24% of TF, and 11% of GNC fearing for their physical safety (Rankin et al., 2010). In community colleges, 47% of trans* students feared for their physical safety (Rankin et al., 2010). Although trans* students consistently shared having negative interactions with peers, faculty, and staff (Beemyn, 2003; Bilodeau, 2009; Carter, 2000; McKinney, 2005; Sausa, 2002; Selman et al., 2012), the manner in which they felt others interacted with them differed by gender. For example, TF respondents shared they most often felt

deliberately ignored, excluded, isolated, or left out, whereas TM respondents felt stared at and singled out as a resident authority most often. (Rankin et al., 2010). Perceptions of a public gaze led many trans* students to employ shame and minimize reports of harassment or violence (Nakamura, 1998). People's perceptions of trans* students, including stereotypes and myths even when education and resources were available, seemed to be an obstacle in creating better interactions (Case et al., 2012). This calls for an examination of whether these resources were institutionalized or required as part of an inclusive diversity education effort.

Despite higher rates of harassment, trans* people of color were more comfortable with the overall campus climate, including in the classroom, than their White trans* peers (Rankin et al., 2010). An intersectional analysis of this data could produce insight in addition to the multiple identity perspective the study included. Did experiences with racism on campus overshadow experiences of genderism, when it was possible to distinguish which oppression was playing out? As trans* people of color may have experienced racist harassment or at least been aware of it before genderist harassment, is it possible that many already developed transferrable strategies that allowed them to deflect and navigate negative environments with less cost to their level of comfort than White trans* people?

From a more institutional perspective, Hart and Lester (2011) saw a lack of recognition of trans* students in institutional discourse such as a university president's addresses or diversity and social justice discussions. Administrators were resistant to any changes that would include trans* students in institutional policies, questioning the need

to do so (Case et al., 2012). Even more specifically, at women's colleges these central messages – or lack thereof – contributed to trans* students perceiving these institutions as being unwelcome spaces (Hart & Lester, 2011; Marine, 2009). Although some student affairs staff at women's colleges saw themselves as advocates and supporters of trans* students on their campuses, in conjunction rather than in conflict with institutional missions (Marine, 2009), others expressed frustration and bewilderment at the presence and enrollment of trans* students on campus (Hart & Lester, 2011). As women's colleges are constructed with the expectation that all students (past, current, and prospective) identify as women and were assigned female at birth, they are often organizationally trans*-exclusionary in every aspect of the institution, from admission policies to on-campus facilities, from language (e.g., the use of words like ladies to describe the student population) to transcripts and lack of trans*-inclusive campus resources (Hart & Lester, 2011; Marine, 2009).

The presence of LGBTQ resources on campuses did not necessarily make trans* students feel more included in or connected to campus. The inconsistency of inclusion and support for trans* students within LGBTQ campus centers and organizations (Beemyn, 2003; Bilodeau, 2009; Rabideau, 2000) meant that these spaces could not be assumed to serve trans* students adequately. Awareness of this inconsistency led to some trans* students masking their gender identities so as not to stand out among other LGBTQ students (Morgan & Stevens, 2008). This inconsistency also further exacerbates trans* students' perception of an overall unwelcoming campus climate.

Classrooms were also not immune to the perception of a negative climate for trans* students. In an unpublished study that utilized previously published and verified data (Rankin et al., 2010), Garvey and Rankin (2012a) found that students who defied gender expression expectations and were more open about their gender identity perceived negative classroom climates. Geography and size of the institutions seemed to produce differing results. Those attending institutions in the suburbs had a more positive perception than those in rural or urban institutions. Students attending larger schools perceived a more negative climate than those in medium-sized and smaller institutions (Garvey & Rankin, 2012a). Trans* students reported fears of receiving poor grades due to instructors' prejudice about trans* people (Rankin et al., 2010).

Perceived climate is also formed through interactions at the individual level with faculty, staff, administration, and peers. Administrators who often either did not respond to students' expressed needs and complaints or actively resisted campus change efforts were central contributors to the perceived negative climate at community colleges (Beemyn, 2003; Case et al., 2012; Rankin et al., 2010; Seelman et al., 2012). Faculty contributed to hostile classrooms or did not know how to address microaggressions the students faced (Garvey & Rankin, 2012a; Marine, 2009; McKinney, 2005; Nakamura, 1998; Negrete, 2007). Staff (Goodrich, 2012; Lynch, 2010; McKinney, 2005; Nakamura, 1998; Seelman et al., 2012), including counseling and medical staff, (Beemyn, 2012; Dean, 2000; McKinney, 2005), were often perceived as uninformed about trans* students' needs and thus not competent to support and engage them. Trans* students also shared experiences of relationships with peers being strained, and thus did not perceive

them to be a part of their social support system (Goodrich, 2012; Hart & Lester, 2011; McKinney, 2005; Pusch, 2005). Considering trans* students often experience unsupportive home environments (McKinney, 2005; Pusch, 2005), affirming campus networks are necessary so as not to further isolate students. This is especially important for community colleges students, many of whom live at home and thus may have very little reprieve from spaces that they perceive do not allow them to acknowledge their full selves (Beemyn, 2012).

Psychological climate. The final dimension of the model, the psychological dimension, is how trans* students feel about an institution, distinguished from the cognitive aspect of perception (Petersen & Spencer, 1990). This is a motivational dimension that influences how trans* students perform, their sense of belonging at, commitment to, and involvement on campus. These are aspects of students' collegiate experience that positively or negatively impact their learning and development (Astin, 1984).

Trans* students whose gender non-conformity showed up in their expression felt the most isolated at their institutions. GNC individuals reported facing resistance and opposition to their nonbinary gender identities from both cisgender and trans* people and communities, including from those that seemed accepting of other trans* people (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). This was particularly true when they asked others to use a different name or gender-neutral pronouns, thus more openly resisting the binary social labeling process of genderism (Bilodeau, 2009). Crossdressing students worried about peers'

reactions, were constantly questioned, and did not find supportive spaces among campus LGBTQ groups (Fried, 2000; Gray, 2000).

It is then perhaps not surprising that trans* students reported a lower sense of belonging than their LGB peers (Dugan et al., 2012), often feeling like they are the only one on campus (Bilodeau, 2009), and invisible or ostracized in the classroom (Negrete, 2007). The dearth of trans*-specific programming and opportunities to participate in trans*-inclusive or -specific groups (McKinney, 2005) blocked attempts to connect with other trans* people on campus (Seelman et al., 2012). Hypervisibility and tokenization were also concerns, particularly for more active trans* students (Hart & Lester, 2011). Avoiding social settings on campus (Negrete, 2007), trans* students sought support and connection with other trans* people online (Goodrich, 2012; Rabideau, 2000). On the other hand, when students' resiliency was supported and emerged (Singh & McKleroy, 2010; Singh, Meng, & Hansen, 2013), their ability to connect with others who affirmed them and advocated with them was bolstered. This allowed them to be in a better position to stay motivated. As an example, even as he struggled with being at a women's college as someone who identified as a man, Lucas, a trans* student at Smith College, felt deeply invested in the community where he had built a network of support (Smothers, 2006).

The impact of hostile climates. Studies have shown strong connections between an institution's climate for a particular population and that group's educational outcomes (e.g. Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1999; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005). The higher rates of marginalization, discrimination, and harassment that trans*

students experience contribute to a number of negative outcomes (Rankin, 2004). A lower sense of belonging on campus (Dugan et al., 2012) and daily microaggressions impact their physical and mental well-being (Nadal et al., 2012). The energy and time-consuming efforts needed to overcome administrative hurdles to rectify university records and to make daily decisions about disclosure and ‘passing’ contributed to elevated stress and overall discomfort with self and others (Goodrich, 2012; Gray, 2000; Rogers, 2000). Negative school settings is correlated with lower income and higher rates of substance abuse, homelessness, incarceration, attaining HIV+ status, participation in sex work, and suicide attempts, impacting overall life quality (Grant et al., 2011).

Stressors led to various health concerns, including depression, anxiety, substance abuse, suicide ideation, and self-harm (Bilodeau; 2009; Dean, 2000; Efrigg et al., 2011; Negrete, 2007). Trans* college students were more than twice as likely to engage in self-injurious behavior than cisgender students, and three times as likely to have attempted suicide (Efrigg et al., 2011). More than half of the trans* participants in Efrigg et al.’s (2011) study had experienced suicide ideation, compared to about 20% of cisgender participants. Unsurprisingly, trans* students reported being more concerned about health matters than cisgender students, yet were also more reluctant to seek help from counseling staff due to the staff’s ignorance of their concerns (McKinney, 2005). Although, these studies did not specifically look at the mental health concerns and help-seeking behaviors of trans* students of color, the negative stigma that many communities of color associate with seeking help (Cheng, Kwan, & Sevig, 2013; Masuda, Anderson,

& Edmonds, 2012) may further disempower trans* students of color to access necessary resources.

These health concerns impact academic and cognitive outcomes and persistence (Beemyn et al., 2005; Rankin et al., 2010; Goodrich, 2012; Gray, 2000), as evidenced by the high numbers of trans* students who seriously considered leaving their institution (38% of TM, 33% of TF, and 39% of GNC students; Rankin et al., 2010). The lack of supportive communities led to almost a third of trans* community college students seriously considered leaving their institutions (Rankin et al., 2010). Perhaps as the result of isolation and being forced to make meaning in a binary world, trans* students made lower gains in complex cognitive skills and socially responsible leadership than their LGB peers (Dugan et al., 2012).

Others' negative reactions to disclosure often reinforced own feelings of not being 'normal' (Pusch, 2005). Those that lived in ways authentic to themselves felt 'normal', while those that did not felt others' reactions reinforced their discomfort with themselves (Bilodeau, 2009; Pusch, 2005), and felt discouraged from pursuing desired transition paths (Pusch, 2005). Combined with fears of negative consequences such as harassment or losing support networks (Bilodeau, 2009), students felt less safe to explore and express their identities (Goodrich, 2012; Rankin et al., 2010). This both acts as an impediment to the students' development (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011), as well as demonstrates a need for student affairs professionals to find effective ways to support trans* students.

Trans* students at community colleges. Most literature on trans* students are contextually based in 4-year institutions (Beemyn, 2012). Ivory (2005) and Leider

(2014) accurately named the lack of research on LGBTQ community colleges students, yet also collapsed the 'T' into LGBTQ, while only addressing sexual orientation. The only empirical study to include trans* community college students was Rankin et al.'s (2010) study, with almost 7% of trans* respondents at community colleges (34 total). Considering the barriers in trans* people's lives, including in employment and educational realms (Grant et al., 2011), trans* people may be more likely to attend two-year institutions, and thus there is a notable gap in the higher education literature (Beemyn, 2012). As these barriers have played a greater role in the lives of trans* people of color (Harrison-Quintana, De Guzman, Chaudry, & Grant, 2012; Harrison-Quintana, Fitzgerald, & Grant, 2012; Harrison-Quintana, Lettman-Hicks, & Grant, 2011; Harrison-Quintana, Pérez, & Grant, 2012; Harrison-Quintana, Quach, & Grant, 2013), this gap furthers the lack of research incorporating trans* students of color.

Recommended practices and policies. The empirical studies mentioned, as well as other publications on trans* students in higher education, have provided a wide array of recommendations for colleges and universities. The role of staff is emphasized as one of advocacy rather than gatekeeping, while acknowledging students' multiple identities and how intersecting systems of oppression operate (Lennon & Mistler, 2010; Nakamura, 1998). The transformation of campus culture necessitates central administration's support and investment (Beemyn, 2003), attention to institutional context and cisgender privilege (Case et al., 2012), and the hiring of trans* staff and faculty (Sausa, 2002).

Recommended interventions include name and gender change protocols that do not require surgical intervention (Beemyn, 2003; Nakamura, 1998; Sausa, 2002; Spade,

2011b), removing or reducing gender segregation in facilities such as restrooms, residence halls, and locker rooms (Beemyn, 2003; Beemyn et al., 2005; Bilodeau, 2009; Carter, 2000; Lynch, 2010; Sausa, 2002; Seelman et al., 2012), as well as co-curricular engagement such as athletics (Griffin, 2012; Negrete, 2007; Seelman et al., 2012), and creating trans*-inclusive applications, forms, and surveys (Beemyn, 2003; Beemyn et al., 2005; Dugan et al., 2012; Sausa, 2002). Access to non-pathologizing trans*-inclusive and trans*-specific health care (Bilodeau, 2005; Lynch, 2010; McKinney, 2005; Nakamura, 1998), policies and procedures to address violence and harassment (Beemyn, 2003; Sausa, 2002), and provision and promotion of resources for trans* students (Beemyn, 2003; Beemyn et al., 2005; Bilodeau, 2005; Marine, 2011; Rankin, 2004; Renn, 2007; Seelman et al., 2012) are also discussed. Educational trainings for the campus community, including instructors, counseling and medical staff, and others with regular student interaction (Beemyn, 2003; Beemyn et al., 2005; Bilodeau, 2009; Carter, 2000; Goodrich, 2012; Lennon & Mistler, 2010; Lynch, 2010; McKinney, 2005; Morgan & Stevens, 2008, 2012; Nadal et al., 2012; Nakamura, 1998; Sausa, 2002; Scott, Belke, & Barfield, 2011; Seelman et al., 2012; Spade, 2011b), infusion of trans* topics in the curriculum (Bilodeau, 2009; Lynch, 2010; Morgan & Stevens, 2008, 2012; Sausa, 2002; Seelman et al., 2012; Spade, 2011b), and trans*-led and -themed programming (Beemyn, 2003; Beemyn et al., 2005; Seelman et al., 2012) can also help reduce ignorance about, hostility towards, and exclusion of trans* students.

Involvement and Leadership

An institution's campus climate, interactions with peers, faculty, and staff have important developmental effects on students (Astin, 1984, 1993). Part of that development plays out in how engaged and involved on campus students become (Astin, 1984). Much of what is known about trans* student involvement and leadership on campus is drawn from LGBTQ studies on those topics, rather than any that center trans* leadership.

A study on patterns of engagement between trans* and LGB students did not demonstrate significant difference in participation rates, but reported lower sense of belonging and lower gains in socially responsible leadership and cognitive skills for trans* students (Dugan et al., 2012). There were in-group differences, as TF students reported lower leadership capacity, efficacy, and positional role attainment than TM students. The lack of mentorship for TF students (Dugan et al., 2012) and the ways that many TF students feel ignored and invisible more so than TM students (Rankin et al., 2010) may account for this discrepancy.

Beemyn et al. (2005) stressed the importance of seeing trans* students as capable contributors and leaders on campus. There is a need to look at how student resiliency is achieved and can be developed (Singh et al., 2013), particularly for trans* students of color caught in the intersections of racism and genderism (Singh & McKleroy, 2010), otherwise "the constant representation of transgender students as troubled... reinforces the persistent belief that these students are in some way mentally unstable or, worse, mentally ill" (Marine, 2011, p. 73). Although some might say the responsibility of

advocacy should not fall on students (Lynch, 2010), the reality is that students are leading the charge for change on campuses (Arthur, 2011; Martin, 2014; Steichmann, 2013; Trans Student Equality Resources, 2013; Yandoli, 2014). These efforts are opportunities for faculty and staff on campus to engage with trans* students, utilize tools such as participatory action research to investigate the change process on campus, be mentors and supporters, and promote socially responsible leadership (Case et al., 2012).

Leadership in LGBTQ-specific organizations has shown to have a positive developmental impact on trans* students (Renn, 2007; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005), bringing increased visibility, a stronger identification as trans*, and promoted additional leadership on and off campus (Renn, 2007). As trans* students challenge and destabilize gender norms and constructs (Berila, 2011; Nagoshi, Brzuzy, & Terrell., 2012), it is perhaps unsurprising that trans* participants tended to fit the researchers' designation of 'queer' rather than 'LGBT' (Renn; 2007; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005), as queer activists sought "to lead for the purpose of challenging social norms" (Renn, 2007, p. 324). Participation in LGBTQ activism promoted self-efficacy and a merged identity development process with leadership (i.e. trans* activist or queer activist as a fused identity; Renn, 2007; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). The queer activists in these studies tended to see the interconnectedness of various oppressions, felt a sense of urgency in their leadership, and hoped for activist careers in the future. These opportunities for campus involvement promoted resiliency and sustained connections with other queer activists and leaders (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005), providing further impetus to assure that campus LGBTQ student organizations are trans*-affirming and inclusive (Beemyn,

2003). Trans* leadership can be further promoted through trans*-specific campus programming and organizations (Beemyn, 2003; Goodrich, 2012; Sausa, 2002), and funding to attend trans*-specific and -inclusive conferences (Sausa, 2002).

Trans* Students of Color and International Trans* Students

Much of the literature explored thus far demonstrates the isolation many trans* students experience on campus. The intersection of racism, ethnocentrism, and genderism makes trans* people of color and non-U.S. trans* people even more invisible and their identities more inaccessible than those of White U.S. trans* people (Bilodeau, 2009). This invisibility is furthered when research in higher education thus far centers White U.S. trans* narratives and constructs, with many studies having exclusively White participant samples (e.g., Bilodeau, 2009; Goodrich, 2012; Morgan & Stevens, 2012). Often race and nationality, as well as other social identities, are left altogether unmentioned or at best unexamined, investigating trans* students' experiences solely from a gender lens and perpetuating a color-blind analysis (Bonilla-Silva, 2009). This ignores the dynamic nature of simultaneity, the operation of multiple social processes such as race, gender, and class together in a way that one's experiences as a trans* person might be experienced differently depending on that individual's social location (Landry, 2007). This also situates Whiteness as norm in trans* literature and narratives (Bonilla-Silva, 2009). There were no studies found solely focusing on the experiences or identities of trans* students of color or trans* international students, with one study including a trans* international student (Bilodeau, 2005).

Racialized gender experiences are also co-opted by White trans* people. A White-identified study participant described their gender identity as Two-Spirit (Bilodeau, 2009), a distinctively Native American conceptualization of sexuality and gender identity that cannot be unfused from its indigenous and aboriginal origins (Cameron, 2005). Such practice extends colonialist logic that seeks to disorder and delegitimize Two-Spirit and other indigenous ways of being (Smith, 2010), partly through assimilating and reconfiguring these identities “into Western constructs of sexuality and gender” (Stryker, 2006, p. 14).

There are few notable exceptions that include perspectives of trans* people of color with Rankin et al.’s (2010) study, which included respondents of color (24%), already discussed. Schilt’s (2006) study illuminated the differential experiences in the workplace for White trans*men who experienced an elevation in attaining benefits and their colleagues’ respect post-transition as compared with trans*men of color. This has implications for students as they consider internships and future careers, as well as jobs while in school, a nuance for campus career center staff to be aware of and address (Scott et al., 2011). Research on the multiple identities of LGBTQ students overwhelmingly focus on sexuality and not gender identity, with a notable difference in research on Two-Spirit people by Wilson and Crow, Brown and Wright (as cited in Bilodeau & Renn, 2005), as Native American conceptions of sexuality and gender identity are more blended than non-indigenous U.S. notions.

Trans* Identity Development Models

Gender identity development models utilized in higher education examine either women's identity (e.g. Gilligan, 1982) or men's identity (Edwards & Jones, 2009); with no comprehensive theory of gender identity development that crosses singular gender bounds (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). With the bulk of publications about trans* students focusing on policy and practice, there is only one published empirical study about trans* students' identity development processes (Bilodeau, 2005). Bilodeau (2005) utilized a case study approach to demonstrate how two trans* students' developmental experiences fit into D'Augelli's (1994) lifespan model of sexual orientation development framework. The study had a number of limitations, including operating from a pre-existing framework that limited how the students' experiences might have otherwise been interpreted. Additionally, by specifically using a sexual orientation model, the study continued to reify the conflation of sexual orientation and gender identity, even as it sought to problematize those same conflation. Furthermore, both students "expressed gender in ways that fall outside traditional constructions of female-to-male and male-to-female" (Bilodeau, 2005, p. 31) and both had been assigned female at birth. Thus, although the study presents a trans* developmental model, it is based on the experiences of two individuals from a particular subset of the trans* population and did not consider whether trans* students who were male-assigned-at-birth for example would fit into the model.

Despite these limitations, as the only non-pathologizing model of trans* student development in existence, the study is still important to consider. Additionally, although

the use of D'Augelli (1994) as its framework is cause for concern, as trans* students are practically and uncritically subsumed with lesbian, bisexual, and gay students on many college campuses when designing programs and interventions (Beemyn, 2003), the model presented by Bilodeau (2005) might be useful for some trans* students who experience their developmental trajectory in line with their LGB peers. Its existence is also a call for additional studies to explore the myriad complex trans* students' identity development processes from a multitude of perspectives and frames.

To supplement the severe lack of trans* students identity development, it is worth looking at Beemyn and Rankin's (2011) study on trans* people's developmental milestones. Although the sample for this study was not exclusively comprised of college students and it is unknown how many were college students, it is still useful within higher education, particularly when considering the genderqueer milestones. The respondents in Beemyn and Rankin's (2011) study who identified as genderqueer were younger than the average of the overall survey population, and the literature they reviewed suggested that younger trans* people are more comfortable with fluid and nonbinary identities.

Additionally, for those wishing to physically transition, the college years might present barriers because of (i) the high costs associated with hormones and surgery, (ii) potential dependence on and lack of parents' and/or guardians' emotional and financial support, (iii) unwillingness or inability to take time during their academic career to undergo and then recover from surgery, and (iv) lack of knowledgeable or accessible medical and counseling staff on or around campus. This is not to suggest that all trans* students identify as genderqueer or would experience the accompanying milestones, just as not all

genderqueer students themselves share the same stories and paths. Rather than, due to the aforementioned reasons, some trans* students, who might identify strongly with one gender or another, might share similar campus and peer-related experiences as their genderqueer and nonbinary counterparts.

The study included 3,500 diverse participants from across the US mapped out the developmental milestones for 4 gender groups – Female-to-Male transsexuals, Male-to-Female transsexuals, crossdressers, and genderqueer people – as depicted in Table 1 (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Although each gender group has their own set of milestones, which are not constructed within a stage or step model, there are some common themes across the groups, as folks progress from “confusion, guilt, and shame to self-acceptance and a sense of wholeness” (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011, p. 115). These include a sense of being different; self-acceptance; altering one’s appearance and/or body (surgically, hormonally, and/or in presentation); meeting others ‘like’ them; and making decisions about disclosing to others.

Trans* people name and identify themselves in a variety of ways. Even those whose experiences, sexes assigned at birth, and current gender identifications share strong similarities, might choose to name their gender identities differently from each other. Thus, the definitions of the four gender groups below are not meant to capture all the ways that trans* people self-identify or understand their gender identity, but are rather simplified and categorized in groups that share some similar life stories (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). *Female-to-Male individuals and Transsexual Men* – This group includes those who were female assigned at birth and who identify as men. *Male-to-Female and*

Transsexual Women – This group includes those who were male assigned at birth and who identify as women. *Cross-dressers* – This group includes folks assigned male at birth presenting in ‘feminine’-designated clothing. The study did not include cross-dressers who were assigned female at birth and presented in ‘masculine’ clothing.

Genderqueer – This group includes individuals with fluid and/or non-binary gender identities regardless of sex assignment at birth.

Genderqueer milestones. The majority of the genderqueer participants in Beemyn and Rankin’s (2011) survey expressed *feeling and often presenting a different gender identity from a young age*. Unlike many of the FTM and MTF identified participants, genderqueer individuals did not grow up expressing a feeling of being the ‘other’ gender, but also did not identify themselves with the gender that was expected of them based on their assigned sex. Clothing and mannerisms were “important ways through which many of the genderqueer participants expressed their gender identity and sought to destabilize traditional gender markers” (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011, p. 150).

Genderqueer individuals also reported *encountering resistance to a nonbinary gender expression or identity*. While many trans* individuals talked about experiencing discrimination and hostility, genderqueer individuals discussed facing opposition even from those that seemed accepting of other trans* people, particularly when asking others to use a different name or gender-neutral pronouns. It is the negating of fluidity and the continuous social labeling of male or female that Bilodeau (2009) described as the first characteristic of genderism.

Table 1. Milestones for each gender group.

FTM Milestones	MTF Milestones	CD Milestones	GQ Milestones
Feeling and often expressing a male gender identity from a young age	Feeling and often expressing a female gender identity from a young age	Attraction to “women’s” clothing and cross-dressing from a young age	Feeling and often expressing a different gender identity from a young age
Repressing or hiding one’s male gender identity in the face of hostility and/or isolation	Repressing or hiding one’s female gender identity in the face of hostility and/or isolation	Buying or obtaining one’s own “women’s” clothing	Realizing that genderqueer is a viable identity
Thinking of oneself as lesbian, but realizing it was not a good fit	Learning about and meeting other transsexual women	Repressing the desire to cross-dress and purging clothing because of shame	Deciding how to express oneself as a genderqueer person
Realizing that there are FTM individuals and that transition is possible	Recognizing oneself as a transsexual, rather than as a cross-dresser	Learning about and meeting other cross-dressers	Encountering resistance to a nonbinary gender expression or identity
Learning about and meeting other transsexual men	Overcoming denial and internalized genderism to accept oneself as female	Overcoming shame to accept oneself as a cross-dresser	Not fitting in with transgender or LGBT communities
Overcoming denial and internalized genderism to accept oneself as male	Taking hormones and perhaps having surgery to look more like self-image	Cross-dressing in public for the first time and adopting a feminine name	Creating a home within or outside of the transgender/ LGBT communities
Taking hormones and having top surgery to look more like self-image	Whether and when to tell others, and developing new relationships after disclosure	Whether and when to tell others, and developing new relationships after disclosure	
Whether and when to tell others, and developing new relationships after disclosure	Having a sense of wholeness even when unable to be seen as a woman	Arriving at a comfortable place with cross-dressing	
Having a sense of wholeness as a different kind of man			

Source: Beemyn & Rankin, 2011, p. 116

In addition to facing this resistance from society at-large, genderqueer respondents also encountered opposition from other trans* people, particularly transsexual men and women who viewed them as not “transgender enough” (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011, p. 153), causing them to often feel like they *did not fit in with transgender or LGBT communities*. They reported facing ridicule, isolation, lack of acceptance or

support, harassment, and violence. Many also felt like other transgender people often reinforced the gender binary that they sought to move away from or opposed entirely. The preceding milestones and experiences often meant that genderqueer individuals ended up making decisions about *creating a home within or outside of transgender/LGBT communities*, at times accessing communities online and having to construct their own spaces at greater rates than other trans* respondents.

The study had its limitations. In terms of race, only 12% of the sample self-identified as people of color. The sample of the initial survey was limited to those with access to computers and the Internet, as it was entirely administered online (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Additionally, it was limited to those who the researchers could access and thus who were visible and out, at least on the Internet. The study sample also skewed heavily towards those who were more open about their identities and more connected to the trans* community, as well as a larger number of the sample identifying and/or presenting as female/feminine. Taking into account trans* people's high levels of experience with discrimination, homelessness, poverty, harassment, and violence, particularly those within the margins of an already marginalized population (i.e., trans*women of color, and working class trans* people; Grant et al, 2011), it is likely that the researchers were unable to reach out to many who simply could not risk exposure, or had little to no means to complete the survey.

Despite these limitations, the size of the sample (3,474 individuals completed the survey), one of the largest ever conducted in the United States, makes the findings of this study useful in representing a vast proportion of experiences of trans* people. This is

amplified by the richness in the stories contained within the 419 follow-up interviews conducted by e-mail, phone, and in-person. Additionally, the researchers did not leave out individuals who did not physically transition completely or at all, or who otherwise would not fit the psychological definition of a ‘true’ transsexual, thus expanding on the populations typically covered in research (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011).

Conclusions

Studies on the experiences of trans* college students provide a dismal outlook, illuminating the hardships and the many areas that need to be addressed to alleviate those hardships, but also making it hard to envision how trans* students can succeed in the collegiate environment. Although there is still a need to unearth hostile campus climates with the intention of transforming them, there is also a need to foreground the ways that trans* students’ resiliency, support networks, and leadership aid in their persistence and contributions to campus and society. As some quantitative studies relied on small sample sizes (e.g., Dugan et al., 2012; Efrig et al., 2011; Rankin, 2004), there is a need for additional studies to aid in comparative insight, as well as larger studies to allow for nuanced perspective on trans* subpopulations (TM, TF, GNC, crossdressing students, and intersectional studies). These also need to be followed up to measure effectiveness – or lack thereof – of any policy changes that may have been implemented.

It was mostly unclear how gender and sex were asked across these studies. Tate, Ledbetter, and Youssef (2013) determined that a single question with four response options (female, male, transgender, other), often used in higher education studies, yielded a higher missing data rate than a two-question method separately asking for current

identity and birth-assigned designation. The two-question method, producing little or no missing data, had twice the response rate among trans* individuals than the single-question method. The conflation of sex, gender identity, and gender expression in many of these studies meant trans* students were not accurately captured, and some that may not identify as trans* (e.g. intersex, crossdresser) were uncritically included.

Although there are only a few non-pathologizing models of identity development for trans* students (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Bilodeau, 2005; Bilodeau, 2009), these studies aid in “the dismantling of dual gender systems, promoting greater freedom from rigid gender roles” (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005, p. 32). These benefit trans* individuals, normalizing their existence and providing necessary insight for campus support.

Additionally, the relaxing of the gender binary and restrictive identity manifestations benefits all students (Bilodeau, 2009), and thus ought to inform and motivate more studies examining the gender identity development processes of all students. Here, the role of queer theory in reconceptualizing gender identity (among other and intersecting identities) as unstable and fluid, and the utility of post-structural theories in infusing the domains of sexism, patriarchy, genderism, and cisnormativity, cannot be minimized (Abes, 2008; Abes et al., 2007; Renn, 2010).

The need to incorporate and highlight diverse trans* voices and experiences so as not to further contribute to the establishment of a singular trans* narrative in higher education has already been stated. This narrative thus far has been overwhelmingly that of White TM students at large public institutions, with a few aforementioned studies including trans* students of color, TF and GNC students, and students at women’s and

community colleges. Identities that appear to be unacknowledged in these studies include ability, socioeconomic class, and sexual orientation. The over-reliance on LGBTQ campus centers, student organizations, and listservs for recruitment may also not yield accurate or diverse enough samples (Garvey & Rankin, 2012b; Renn, 2010), particularly considering the trans*-exclusive nature of some of these spaces.

Acknowledging these limitations, the study at hand seeks to extend the literature on trans* students and fill specific gaps. By focusing on trans* masculine students, the study seeks to disaggregate trans* populations who thus far have only been examined as a singular monolithic group. The investigation of masculinity from a trans* masculine perspective has already been discussed as extending the literature on masculinity in higher education, but it bears restating as it also contributes to the literature on trans* students which predominantly focuses on climate and experience. Furthermore, by recruiting participants with a variety of multiple identities across race, sexual orientation, class, and ability, and exploring how those identities and corresponding experiences inform their conceptualizations of masculinity, the study resists the further entrenchment of the singular trans* narrative in higher education.

Limitations, Conclusions, and Implications

The preceding review examined the literature on the construct of masculinity in higher education, and the experiences and identity development of trans* students in the collegiate environment. The first portion of the review provided an outlook on how masculinities are understood and approached in the research, with the adoption of hegemonic masculinity as a framework in most of this literature illuminating its impact

and critiquing its dominance so as to dismantle it (Connell, 2005). However, the oft-made assumptions and conflation of sex, gender identity, and expression lessened the transformative potential of the literature, as they maintained the essentialist connection between masculinity and cisgender men. The second portion of the review examined trans* students' experiences within a genderist collegiate environment that renders their existence invisible, exposing them to all manners of harm (Bilodeau, 2009). This section highlighted the dominance of White trans*masculine narratives in public institutions, the uncritical aggregation of trans* students as both a monolithic community and within a broader LGBTQ population, and the lack of scholarship on students' resiliency. The overall review demonstrated the 'othering' and exclusion of trans* voices within higher education literature, including when examining gender identity and masculinity.

The increasing visibility of trans* students in higher education highlights the many gaps in gender-related literature in higher education. Future research on gender, including masculinities, should not only incorporate diverse gender realities, but also bolster the utility of intersectional frameworks to continue dismantling the centering of a dominant hegemonic masculinity and gender hierarchy (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Andersen & Collins, 2013; Connell, 2005; Wagner, 2011). Queer theory is useful to challenge gender essentialism, as well as question all acts and identities that are deemed either normative or deviant, as well as questioning those designations in the first place (Abes, 2008; Abes & Kasch, 2011; Renn, 2010). Additionally, the emergence of the interdisciplinary field of trans* studies provides a transfeminist centered approach

through which scholarship can investigate the intersections of sex, gender, identity, and culture, while centering trans*feminine perspectives (Enke, 2012).

The queering of gendered spaces in higher education necessitates calling into question everything from binary constructions of campus facilities and demographic survey questions, to adoptions of masculine ideologies and behaviors in leadership, to cultures of competition and individual-over-community progress. As institutions expand on needed and targeted interventions in working with college men (Harper & Harris, 2010; Laker & Davis, 2011), these interventions must also make room for constant reevaluation of who the targeted population is, what it means to be a man, and whether the intervention's presence (e.g. name of the program, promotional materials, learning outcomes) reifies or dismantles hegemonic masculinity. What is the impact of these programs on those directly involved, as well as other campus community members with whom participants interact and build relationships? Do the programs help shift the masculine culture of the institution or merely enact individual-level change?

Queer theory problematizes binaries beyond just within gender and sexuality, such as K-12 and higher education, or online and offline spaces (Renn, 2010). Trans* students are exploring and disclosing their gender identities at younger ages, and particularly for those with access to online communities, there are increasing opportunities to be exposed to other trans* people and language (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). The queering of the dichotomy between K-12 and higher education research and practice (Renn, 2010) would allow for scholars to ask how high school and other pre-college experiences with disclosure, harassment, and adults (including educators)

influence their expectations and perceptions of their college experiences, and better inform intervention efforts at all educational levels (Goodrich, 2012). Online space must also be understood as not additive to these experiences but very much a part of them, as the omnipresence of social media means that offline and online interactions and experiences bleed into each other and impact student identity development (Eaton, 2014).

Hegemonic masculinity continues to be a useful framework for scholarship and programmatic interventions, as it maintains the focus on how power and privilege operate to privilege certain men over all other genders, while policing men's behavior and conceptions of self (Connell, 2005). During explorations of self, many trans* students may be experimenting with and trying on various masculinities, femininities, and androgynous ways of being (Berila, 2011). As one of the motivating factors for this experimentation includes fitting into the campus community and society as a whole, how does the presence of hegemonic masculinity influence how trans* students understand themselves? Do some (particularly trans*masculine students) adopt and perpetuate patriarchal norms and what motivates these adoptions? How does the pressure for trans*masculine students to continuously prove the authenticity of their masculinities and the 'wrong body' narrative (Engdahl, 2014) influence the trans*masculine students' accessibility and acceptability of divergent and non-hegemonic masculinities, as well as femininities? What role do Whiteness, class privilege, and ability status play in framing trans*masculinities? How does the presence or lack of trans* educators and administrators in the collegiate environment influence all of these questions? Although this study does not thoroughly answer all of the aforementioned questions, it does explore

how trans*masculine students understand, define, and adopt a masculine identity.

Additionally, the study investigates how students' various intersecting identities, such as race, sexuality, socioeconomic status, and ability status, inform their masculine identity and conceptions of masculinity.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology used to conduct a qualitative phenomenological study on trans*masculine students' conceptions of masculinity. Beginning with a brief review of the study purpose, the chapter presents the research questions, research design and rationale, the researcher's epistemological approach, data collection and analysis, and the design's strengths and limitations. References are made to related documents, such as consent forms, study protocols, and recruitment materials.

As demonstrated in the literature review (see Chapter 2), despite growing attention to masculinity studies on college campuses (Harper & Harris, 2010; Laker & Davis, 2011), these studies and conceptions of masculinity are overwhelmingly driven by and about cisgender men (Mayo, 2012). Trans*masculine students' perspectives on and experiences with masculinity are not considered. As such it is unknown whether or not trans*masculine students find that current conceptions of college masculinities speak to their experiences or definitions of their own masculinities, and whether or not they believe that their only option in adopting a masculine identity involves adopting the narrative of the dominant hegemonic masculine ideal (Connell, 2005). This study sought to understand how trans*masculine students come to understand masculinity – both in general and for themselves – and what it means to them, how they describe it, and how they have come to adopt that understanding and description or redefine it for themselves.

The study also attends to how intersecting identities influences one's understanding and definition of masculinity.

Research Questions

1. How, if at all, do trans*masculine college students understand, define, and adopt a masculine identity?
 - a. What influences or shapes trans*masculine students' understanding of masculinity?
 - b. How do trans*masculine students define masculinity in general and for themselves? How, if at all, do these definitions differ from each other?
 - c. How, if at all, do their institutions of higher education shape these understandings and definitions?
2. How, if at all, do their various and salient intersecting identities inform their masculine identity?
 - a. How, if at all, does race inform their masculine identity?
 - b. How, if at all, does sexuality inform their masculine identity?
 - c. How, if at all, does ability status inform their masculine identity?
 - d. How, if at all, does socioeconomic status inform their masculine identity?
 - e. How, if at all, do campus experiences with these identities inform their masculine identity?

Research Design and Epistemology

In order to explore the above questions, this study utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach. A phenomenological study focuses on a concept as lived

and experienced by a group of individuals (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). In this case, the study explores the essence of masculinity as experienced by trans*masculine students, while resisting the creation of a singular essence. Specifically, this dissertation study utilizes post-intentional and queer approaches to phenomenology (Ahmed, 2006; Vagle, 2014). Although traditional phenomenology concerns itself with essentializing a concept, the post-intentional approach opens up phenomenology to “multiplicity, difference, and partiality” (Vagle, 2014, p. 114), making it a “dialogic philosophy” (p. 114), seeking out what a phenomenon might become rather than what it is. This is done by hearing multiple, complex, and variant voices rather than seeking out the emergence of a singular common voice. The practice of honoring variance and complexity opens up phenomenology to be in dialogue with intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; Vagle, 2014), allowing for divergent voices of trans*masculine students to come through.

Similarly, queer phenomenology is also disruptive. Queer phenomenology concerns itself with orientation and the revelations of how queerness disrupts and disorients accepted paths and directions dictated by social relations. It builds on feminist, queer, and critical race theorists’ work that illuminate “how social differences are the effects of how bodies inhabit spaces with others” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 5) and positions phenomenology to be political and transformative. It does so by making disorientation a necessary experience in order to understand how we are orientated. Queer phenomenology simultaneously acknowledges that certain orientations are scripted and organized, while being interested in the deviations from those scripts. Queer phenomenology furthers phenomenology’s attention to how bodies are historically

shaped through the repetitions of paths and scripts that in turn make those same histories disappear (Ahmed, 2006). In essence, through the repetition of certain gestures and roles over time, certain bodies are led in particular directions, naturalizing in this case gender and gendered bodies and providing them with certain orientations. Exploring orientations and disorientations in this way unearths how one's understanding of masculinity may be informed by historicity and social differences that might otherwise be hidden.

Rationale for Qualitative Phenomenological Approach

The disruptive and political intentions of queer and post-intentional phenomenologies make these ideal for the purposes of this study. Post-intentional phenomenology (Vagle, 2014) is a useful approach for its recognition of the unstable and changing ways that people, objects, and phenomenon are connected. It does not assume that any one thing, such as masculinity, “can be thought of as stable, singular, and final” (p. 118), allowing for it to be challenged, constructed and re-constructed, performed, and transformed. Its post-structural reading of intentionality situates the instability of an object, person, or phenomenon in relation with other objects, persons, phenomena, as well as structures, such as genderism (Bilodeau, 2009), hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005), and intersecting systems of oppression (Crenshaw, 1991, 2003).

Queer phenomenology's centering of disorientation makes it a fitting epistemology and approach to centering trans*masculine students' (dis)orientation towards masculinity. The exploration of the experiences and adoption of masculine identities by those expected to embody the feminine disrupts social relations and creates new possibilities within and outside of masculinity. Ahmed (2006) recognized that

bodies are not orientated at random, but are rather directed in certain directions more than others, and that joining communities might require aligning one's self to that community's collective direction. Thus queer phenomenology is ideal in exploring how trans*masculine students negotiate aligning or disidentifying (Muñoz, 1999) with hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005), what might be described as the collective direction of masculinity.

In addition to how Vagle (2014) and Ahmed's (2006) phenomenological orientations fit the purposes of this study, qualitative research itself is also ideal. As I am interested in how trans*masculine students interpret their experiences and make meaning of them, qualitative research enables understanding masculinity from the perspectives of the students themselves (Merriam, 2009). Considering the lack of theory or literature exploring this understanding, qualitative research is useful in its adoption of an inductive process to build this concept from the data gathered and offer rich description through the data (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Additionally, the researcher is seen as the primary research instrument, acknowledging biases and subjectivities rather than assuming an objective stance. This is explored further in the following section.

Reflexivity

As the primary research instrument (Merriam, 2009), it is important to explore the researcher's positionality and biases, allowing for these subjectivities to be bridled (Vagle, 2014). Bridling involves the acknowledgment of pre-study understandings of a phenomenon so as not to limit the openness with which a researcher approaches said phenomenon. It is an active and ongoing reflexive practice of putting aside, rather than

removing, one's own knowledge and experiences of a phenomenon in order to attend to the study's validity (Merriam, 2009; Vagle, 2014).

I, the researcher, identify as a trans*man of color, and employ both in-group and out-group referent lenses to the topic of study and the population that will inform the study. As part of the trans*masculine community, I share that broad descriptor in common with all potential study participants (in-group), but as a person of color and more specifically as a Middle Eastern person my gendered journey is racialized in particular ways (out-group to some and not others). For the most part, my gender identity aligns with the word 'man', whereas that was not the case for all study participants. My gender expression is also pretty consistently masculine, or what is considered masculine in dress and appearance in present day U.S. heteropatriarchal society shaped by middle class sensibilities. This includes a visible dark beard and mustache that send identifiable signals of manhood and masculinity that do not conflict with what people expect to see someone with facial hair wearing. No longer considered ambiguous or androgynous, I no longer make heads turn and faces squirm with my gender presentation. My femininity is rarely recognized, sometimes by design, sometimes by habit, sometimes because it is lost in translation, and the lack of visible femininity on a masculine body like mine often means others do not recognize my queerness. This might be different if I wore makeup, high heels, skirts, or certain types of jewelry, which may be particularly 'visible' alongside my facial hair, broad(er) shoulders and flat chest. The lack of dark skin or an accent that reveals my Lebanese origin, or any visible markers of disability (e.g., a wheelchair or cane) or non-Christian dress (e.g., a keffiyeh or turban) or low-income

status (e.g., torn or dirty clothes) leave me not standing out in most crowds. To many I appear ‘normal.’ This privileges me with the kind of temporal invisibility that many others do not experience, and I am rarely read as a threat or an outsider or strange, and thus rarely feel I am in danger of pity, scorn, harassment, or violence. It is only when my trans*ness becomes apparent or ‘visible’ through a button I am wearing or disclosure, or when I choose to wear a keffiyeh or a t-shirt emblazoned with queer messaging, that those dangers may arise. Even then, they are remnants of past histories and experiences, and show up as microaggressions rather than outright assaults. All of this is not to say I see marginalized identities as necessarily tragic, but to name the many ways that my masculinity is rarely questioned or challenged, and how the way I experience other people’s perceptions of me and my identities allow for that. Those perceptions appear to be tied to conceptions of gender as something that is necessarily embodied, meaning that it is necessarily expressed by or possessed within the body. So my masculinity is ‘seen’ at a surface level, mostly by what is covering my skin (i.e., my clothes and what they reveal about the shape of my body, and my facial and body hair). My embodied masculinity thus acts as shield and protector, and as concealer. It shields and protects me from some, not all, enactments of cissexism, sexism, misogyny, racism, classism, and ableism. It conceals, whether I want it to or not, my gendered history and story, and both the embodied and non-embodied ways I carry femininity and masculinity on and within me. It conceals that masculinity and femininity are constantly in interaction and negotiation with each other in my heart, in my memories, in my choices and decisions, in my hopes and dreams and aspirations, in my emotions, in my attractions and dislikes and

ambivalences, and on my body. “They” can’t and don’t see me. Sometimes I wonder if even I can and do see myself.

Assigned female at birth, I do have my own narrative and gender journey that inform my conceptualization of masculinity and maleness, both generally and for myself, all of which are continuously evolving and unstable. This could act as a bias in interpreting other people’s narratives and journeys, and thus caution must be exercised to stay true to each participant’s story. For example, my father has simultaneously a lot to do and nothing to do with how I understand masculinity/ies. His particular enactments of his masculinity were abhorrent to me, ones I equated with weakness of character, laziness, lack of a sense of responsibility to others, toxicity, and violence. I grew up physically looking like him and wanting not to ever become him, delaying my own transition to manhood for a long time. I sometimes still hear my mother’s angry voice, whenever I did or said anything she wanted to shut down, telling me that I am just like him. Both those transition delays and my obsession perhaps with masculinity were initially driven by my fear that my mother was right. Over time, my choices and decisions have become less and less about what I do not want to become or who I do not want to become like, but more about wanting to unearth who I can and want to be. Thus I have moved from being motivated by fear and rage to being motivated by love and compassion, for myself and for others. I was cognizant of my own – now non-existing – relationship with my father when participants spoke about theirs, acknowledging whatever common threads we might share or any emotions that would come up in the

moment for me. This acknowledgement allowed me to name my presence in their narratives and then to remove it, to set it aside, so I could hear them clearly.

My masculinity is highly relational, and to me it feels like it is in constant conversation with the people around me. So perhaps it is not surprising that I am invested in unearthing how others who were also assigned female at birth understand their own masculinities. My positionality as a member of a highly marginalized, oppressed, and often isolated and invisible¹ population means the likelihood of gaining the trust of study participants is elevated. My experiences are not in any way generalizable to the whole trans*masculine population and I am driven by my desire to elevate the voices in the margins, including of and within trans*masculine communities.

Here, I have not offered a ‘complete’ understanding of masculinity for myself, how I came to define it, and how my own intersecting identities and experiences in higher education have shaped my understanding of masculinity, in general and for myself. Partly, this is because I am unable to articulate a definition verbally, and partly because I intend to extend my reflexivity practice throughout the study process through consistent journaling. When appropriate, I have inserted these reflexive moments into my analysis and summary in order to come clean with participants and readers. Being a part of the Brown Boi Project (BBP; n.d.), a community of masculine-of-center people of color, I have been exposed to so much beauty and diversity in the masculinities embodied and

¹ Here I reference the ‘invisibility’ of trans* people, communities, and bodies, not because I believe trans*ness shows up in any particular way, whether physically or otherwise. Rather this ‘invisibility’ is imposed by genderism and the binary lens that does not have room for many genders to show up in many different ways, categorizing all into two distinct, oppositional, and non-interactive delineations, and by extension erasing those genders that do not fit.

carried by so many in the BBP family. I see masculinities in our eyes and smiles, our resilience and resistance, our conversations and hangouts. My own masculinity lives in community and dialogue with these folks and I am unable to capture any of that adequately with mere words and language.

As the study progressed, my intention was to continuously ask myself the questions I asked of participants to capture the evolution of my understanding alongside theirs and to honor the relational way in which I learn about myself. This intention was derailed by personal life circumstances that feel very relevant to this study and thus will be discussed abstractly. It quickly became apparent that I could not bridle *just* prior to conducting participant interviews, but that I needed to do it throughout. I spent time reflecting and journaling in order to acknowledge and set aside what was occurring for me personally rather than allow it to impact the interpretation and analysis of participants' responses.

During the data collection stage, my partner at the time initiated an accountability process with me that ended with the dissolution of our relationship. The relationship itself was headed in that direction, and the accountability piece happened to occur during those final couple of months. Although the breakup itself caused heartache, it was the emotional and mental distress brought on by the accountability process and its aftermath that is relevant here. Without going into every detail in order to respect the identities and perspectives of many involved, the process triggered self-hatred in me that was deeply tied to my masculinity, how I do or do not enact it, and its impact on myself and others. For months, I conducted interviews and jotted down notes from them out of obligation to

participants and to see the study through, while being called into question (mostly by others, and then by myself) as to how I could dare speak to this topic, if my masculinity was toxic and caused harm.

The analysis stage was excruciating. I struggled with reading and interpreting transcripts without hearing my ex's voice in my head. Where I had found beauty, power, and comfort in my masculinity and in those of other trans*masculine people, I could only see her rage, pain, and hatred. I had to put those transcripts away, attend to my own healing, accept that I could do nothing for hers, before I could in earnest hear the participants' voices again. This occurred during the months of summer 2015 and involved a lot of traveling, therapy, and most importantly soul-saving and life-giving discussions with chosen family, people I could trust to demonstrate love and care without giving me a pass on misogyny. Many of these folks are in my life because of the Brown Boi Project, a community of people that strive to embody masculinities centered in love, self-care, and accountability. This community, this family – both within and outside of BBP – saved my life and restored my soul. They reacquainted me with me, reminded me of who I am and who I can be, and reinstalled in me that I do deserve to be loved – by myself and others.

I allowed love to come back into my heart, and by doing so I could slowly disentangle the word masculinity from hatred, toxicity, harm, disillusionment, hypocrisy, and worthlessness. I could hear these students again the way they wanted me to hear them, through their own voices and filters, rather than the filters of my own insecurities. Although the experiences that led me here will continue to be ones I carry with me, lest I

ever give myself a pass for enacting misogyny and because they add another layer to my lens, they are no longer embedded in my core and I do not operate in constant reaction to them. They are lessons, painful and challenging ones, and I will continue to learn from them. Just as importantly, I have and will learn from the narratives that the participants of this study and many other trans*masculine people share with me, unapologetically and selflessly, about the radical and limitless possibilities of non-oppressive and unmasked masculinities.

Research Method

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand how trans*masculine students conceptualize and define masculinity. This is in line with phenomenological approaches that seek “knowledge that emerges from a transcendental or pure ego, a person who is open to see what is, just as it is, and to explicate what is in its own terms” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 41). In order to gather “rich descriptions” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 12) to maximize understanding of the phenomenon, information rich sources were utilized in the data gathering stages. The discussion of study participants and data generation tools follows.

Study Participants

Recruitment and selection. Post-intentional phenomenology’s inclination towards “multiplicity, difference, and partiality” (Vagle, 2014, p. 114) necessitates the employment of maximum variation sampling. Maximum variation sampling is the purposeful selection of individuals that represent a wide range of experiences (Merriam, 2009). It is also imperative to seek out diverse and divergent perspectives to resist the

construction of a homogeneous trans*masculinity (singular) informed dominantly by White, heterosexual, and able-bodied trans*men. The researcher's in-group access to trans*masculine communities and spaces allowed for the purposeful selection of individuals that span regional, institutional, racial, and other identity-related representations. Due to an overwhelming response from individuals interested in participating in the study (discussed more in the Online Participant Screening Form section), it was unnecessary to use snowball sampling to identify additional participants as initially planned (Merriam, 2009). Participant criterion included (i) individuals who were female assigned at birth, (ii) who currently attend an institution of higher education as a matriculating undergraduate or graduate student, and (iii) whose gender identity and/or expression is trans*masculine. Trans*masculine may include those who identify as trans*men, transmale, female-to-male, genderqueer, boi, Two Spirit, aggressive, stud, masculine-of-center, and other signifiers that may be unknown to the researcher.

Participants were recruited predominantly through various listservs, a website, and social media settings. Additionally, quarter sheet flyers (Appendix B) and business cards (Appendix C) were printed and dispersed during the Creating Change conference held in Denver, CO in February 2015. Creating Change is the largest LGBTQ conference in the U.S. with almost 4,000 attendees in 2015 (National LGBTQ Task Force, 2016), making it an ideal location to recruit diverse participants from across the country. The quarter sheet flyers were left in several hotel hospitality suites, spaces the host committee designated where individuals from specific communities (and at times friends/family/partners of) could come to take a break from the conference, meet others

from those communities, and be treated to meals and snacks. Flyers and business cards were left in the (i) trans*, intersex, and non-binary, (ii) disability, (iii) bisexual, omnisexual, pansexual, and polysexual, and (iv) people of color suites. Business cards were also handed to individuals when pre-existing knowledge about or casual conversations led to disclosures of trans*masculine identity and college student status. Additionally, business cards and flyers were given to people attending the annual meeting for the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals (colloquially referred to as the Consortium; n.d.) held at Creating Change. The Consortium membership consists of over 300 staff, graduate students, and faculty, who work in LGBTQ student affairs on college and university campuses and have access to the students on their campuses directly and/or through student organizations and campus-based listservs.

Prior to attending Creating Change, a recruitment email was sent out to two listservs populated with higher education professionals and scholars to disseminate to students on their campuses (see Appendix D). These listservs were the Consortium's membership listserv, and the Social Justice Training Institute (SJTI) faculty and alumni listserv. Similar to the flyers and business cards, the recruitment emails directed interested participants to a link and an initial screening site that provided study information to potential participants, and assistance with purposive sampling and determining study eligibility for the researcher (see Appendix E). The final page of the site asked potential participants to indicate whether they were a current undergraduate or graduate student or neither, whether they identified as trans*masculine, and to describe

their gender, racial/ethnic, ability/disability, sexuality, SES/class, and other identities important to them. The information solicited on this last page was received via email and entered into an excel sheet by the researcher.

The link was also shared on various social media sites such as Instagram, Facebook, and through the use of hashtags (e.g., #trans, #brownboi #ftm) on Twitter. In addition to the researcher's personal timeline, the following is a list of Facebook group pages where the link was posted:

- Student affairs, higher education, and research related: QPOC [Queer People of Color] Student Affairs Professionals; Student Affairs Professionals; NASPA Trans* Inclusion Working Group; Trans* Educators; Academy of the Lost Arts; Trans* Research; Brown Bois Infiltrate Higher Ed; LGBTQ Research & Researchers in HESA [Higher Education and Student Affairs].
- Social justice, activism, and community outreach related: Student SJTI Alumni; the spaceship; Darker Shades of Queer; Deaf Queers and Allies.

These posts were made at the end of January 2015, with the intention of posting once or twice each month until a substantial enough number had indicated interest in the study, from which to select a participant pool diverse in race/ethnicity, sexuality, ability, and socioeconomic status. Repeat posts were unnecessary as the initial one garnered substantial response. For additional information on the participant pool, see the Online Participant Selection Form section.

There were three unsuccessful attempts made to recruit participants for focus groups. This included at the Upper Midwest Queer Indigenous and People of Color (QIPOC) Conference in Minneapolis, MN in early April, a historically women's college in the South in late April, and PTHC in early June. One or two focus group sessions were scheduled at each of the above sites, all of which had been picked for being participant-rich environments from which to recruit participants. Despite promotional efforts and the ideal locations picked for the focus groups, low turnout at the scheduled sessions did not allow for focus groups to occur. However, five individuals who showed up with a desire to participate agreed to interview as pairs or individually instead. Chapter 6 includes a discussion of potential explanations for the low turnout and what future researchers may want to consider.

Participant descriptions. The participant descriptions utilize pseudonyms that the students provided themselves. In cases where participants did not have a preference for a particular pseudonym, I suggested ones to them and sought their approval before using them here. The descriptions were created using language and terms provided by the participants themselves in demographic forms that allowed them to answer these questions in open-ended boxes rather than by checking off a limited list of options. Additionally, the descriptions utilize the pronouns provided by the participants, which typically included he/him/his and gender-neutral pronouns, such as they/them/theirs and ze/hir/hirs. “Ze” is pronounced “zee”, “hir” is pronounced “here”, and “hirs” is pronounced “heres.” Some students used more than one set of pronouns, and thus I use different ones alternately. Unless it is clear that I am discussing a group of people, the

use of the pronoun “they” will more often than not be referring to one individual. To further ensure confidentiality, descriptors that could reveal who the participants are based on their institutions, such as majors and geographical locations of the institutions, were highly generalized. For example, instead of states, institutional locations were grouped into one of four regions based on the U.S. Census – Northeast, South, Midwest, and West.

It is worth reflectively noting that this practice elicited particular reactions both in the participants and in myself. As individuals who have often fought hard to name ourselves and to be referred to by our chosen names, the concept of giving that name up and taking on another one while participating in a trans*-focused study felt disingenuous, disappointing, and even counter-intuitive. A few times I heard participants sigh in sadness or ask if they had to, when I asked them for a pseudonym. Without saying outright that they had to choose a different name, I would explain the purpose of the pseudonym as a measure of protecting their own privacy. That rationale for me felt hollow and impersonal, as I offered a perfectly logical explanation (PLE; Davis & Harrison, 2013) to why I was separating their name from their story, when for many trans* individuals our names *are* part of our stories. PLEs are rationales that are offered when conscious or unconscious oppression is enacted, often as a way to explain away the oppression and clear one’s complicity in it. In this case, I was taking on the role of oppressor, excusing how I was essentially taking away the participants’ right to self-determination, taking away their chosen names, and asking them to replace it with one that may or may not have any meaning to them. I believe the conflict presented here

between protecting participant privacy and participant agency is a topic of ethical and justice-oriented concern that ought to be taken on by conscious researchers, discussed, debated and written about, in order to avoid further marginalizing trans* research participants.

Participant demographics. Through selective recruitment, the group of 19 study participants was diverse across a number of demographic categories, both in terms of social identities and institutional variations, with some identifiable gaps. 12 of the participants were undergraduates, six were graduate students, and one was a continuing education student. Regionally, four participants were at institutions in the Northeast, three in the Midwest, and six each in the South and in the West. Ten participants attended 4-year public institutions, while nine attended 4-year private institutions, including three who attended women's colleges and one who attended a minority-serving institution (MSI). Additionally, one graduate student participant had attended an MSI for his undergraduate. None attended community colleges, other 2-year institutions, or historically men's institutions. While the differing terms participants used to describe their socioeconomic statuses does not allow for conclusively quantifying and categorizing them (for example, is "poor" the same as "working class", and are either the same as "lower class"?), there was variation across the participants, including descriptions of changing statuses (e.g. one participant described themselves as "Raised upper middle-class..., currently living in poverty"). Eight of the participants disclosed various emotional, cognitive, and physical disabilities. It is important to note that that does not necessarily mean that 11 of the participants did not *have* disabilities, but that they did not

disclose any. 11 of the participants identified as people of color (two as Black, three as Latinx, one as Middle Eastern, one as Asian-American, and four as multiracial), and eight identified as White. None of the participants identified as international students or disclosed undocumented status or identity. In terms of sexuality, one student identified as asexual, one as heteroflexible, two as pansexual, one as attracted to femininity, one as attracted to women, one as bisexual, and 12 as queer. The next section presents each of the participants individually using language and terms they themselves provided.

Individual descriptions. Coffee Bean is a media and gender studies junior, who identifies as Latin@ and NicaMexiGreek. They disclosed having Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and identifying as queer and working class. A trans*masculine non-binary individual, Coffee Bean sees themselves as a geek, friend, and an artist. They attend a public university in the Northeast.

RJ uses the terms transgender, masculine-of-center, and genderqueer to describe their gender. Identified as Boricua and Latinx, RJ is a first-generation graduate religious studies student at a private Southern institution. They identify as pansexual, disabled, and working class, and as a bilingual youth organizer.

Daniel is a White transmasculine cultural studies junior in the Midwest. He is queer and comes from a middle class background. Daniel attends a private institution.

Kyle is a spiritualist and Afro-revolutionary poet who strongly identifies as a feminist. He is a Black Cherokee man of transgender experience. A queer and working poor student, Kyle is a sociology senior at a public institution in the South.

Seth is one of four participants attending a private women's college. A first year student in the West, he is a transmasculine and pansexual Latino person who experiences occasional anxiety and comes from a lower middle class background. Ze has currently not declared a major.

Earl is a public health graduate student who uses the term Queer to describe both his gender and his sexuality. He is an African-American and poor student at a public institution in the West.

James is a multiracial transmale business major from a middle class background. He identifies as White, Black, Native American, and Asian, as well as a poet and writer. James is a junior at a public institution in the Northeast.

Bastian is a special education and curriculum graduate student at a public institution in the Midwest. A Lakota Jew with passing-for-white privilege (he is also Irish, Scottish, French, German-Austrian, and Italian-Sicilian), Bastian identifies as a heteroflexible, sapioromantic, demisexual, Two-Spirit TransMan. He disclosed multiple disabilities, including several related to chronic pain, mental illness, and other chronic health related ones. Bastian was raised upper middle-class, but currently lives in poverty. He is a teacher, a writer, a marching band geek, and an arts appreciator.

Demian is a White masculinist gender neutral person with mild depression and dissociative disorder. A queer and upper-middle class individual, they are a studio arts first-year student at a private institution in the West.

Jack is a White disabled trans and male queer person attending a private institution in the South. He is a deaf studies graduate student who identifies as an interpreter, photographer, and musician.

Jones is a Korean-American dentistry student. He identifies as transmasculine, queer, and low middle class. They are attending a public institution in the South.

Mohammad is a Palestinian Middle Eastern transgender man/boi. They are a senior studying gender and sexuality at a public institution in the West and come from a lower middle class background. He loves femmes.

Charles studies theatre at a public institution in the West and identifies as a queer trans* man, transgender man, or FTM (Female-to-Male). He is Japanese, Hawaiian, Chinese, Portuguese, Irish, and possibly English. They are attracted to femininity in all its forms and were raised middle(ish) working class. Charles strongly identifies as a feminist and with his familial roles, such as son, grandson, and brother.

Blake is a White non-binary transmasculine graduate student in education in the Northeast. They pass as able-bodied, but have arthritis and anxiety. Blake is a queer Southerner from an upper class background.

Jay is a Black undergraduate student African American history and gender studies. He is a working class queer transman and a returning non-traditional adult student with disabilities. Jay attends a public institution in the Midwest.

Eli is an asexual White trans-masculine person. He is middle class and attends a private women's college in the South. Eli is a junior in the math and sciences.

Peter attends the same institution as Eli and identifies as a bisexual androgynous male. He is a White upper-middle class sophomore, also in the sciences. Eli and Peter interviewed together.

Stephen is a White queer transman from a working and lower-middle class background. He is a continuing education student in design at a private institution in the Northeast.

Gabriel is a public health junior at a private institution in the West who is attracted to women. He is White and uses the terms transman, boi, stone butch and trans masc (short for masculine) to describe his gender. Gabriel and Stephen also interviewed together while attending the Philadelphia Trans Health Conference.

Data Collection

Online participant screening form. To assist in purposive sampling, an online participant screening form was shared to potential participants through recruitment emails on listservs and social media. The form included information about the study itself, study eligibility, and a copy of the consent form (see Appendix E). The form also asked participants to input basic demographic information, asked through open-ended questions rather than the selection of a limited number of pre-determined options. Since this demographic information will not be utilized for any quantitative analysis purposes, it was not necessary for there to be measurable consistency across participants' answers. Rather it provided the researcher with the language the participants utilize to describe themselves and thus the ability to respect their self-determination when naming their

identities. This practice is important in this study to avoid essentializing social identities, especially gender, given the topic of study.

Within three weeks 49 individuals had submitted an interest form and another two had contacted me directly. Out of the total 51 respondents, 47 made contact within less than one week. A 52nd respondent submitted the form almost three months later. Immediately, eight of the individuals were disqualified as they did not meet one of the study criteria – being a current undergraduate or graduate student. The disqualified individuals were emailed so as to be made aware of the reason for disqualification, in case any of them had mistakenly identified themselves as not being a current college student. In addition to this eight, several individuals made contact through direct email or social media to indicate that while they realized they did not qualify for the study due their lack of a student status, they were still interested in being a part of the study. This overwhelming response, including from many non-students, furthers the significance of this study. There is clear interest from trans*masculine people to discuss and potentially think through masculinity, what it means to them, and to share their stories. As information about the study was on my personal website, which included my various identities, social justice activism, involvement in trans* communities, and personal pictures, it is also worth wondering what role, if any, the availability of that information also had in people's decision to indicate interest.

Almost 60% (or 26) of the 44 qualified respondents were current undergraduate students, and just over 40% (or 18) were graduate students. A majority of qualified respondents (27 or 61%) indicated White or Caucasian as their race/ethnicity, and as not

having any disabilities (28 or 64%). The disabilities that the 16 individuals disclosed included hearing, cognitive, mobility, and chronic illness or pain related disabilities. Out of the eight disqualified respondents, only half identified as White or Caucasian, and only two as not having any disabilities. Although generalizations cannot be made due to the low total number of disqualified individuals, this difference is worth noting as it raises questions that may inform future research (see Chapter 6 for further discussion).

Respondents shared an array of descriptors when asked about their gender, sexual, and classed identities, as well as when given the opportunity to share other identities important to them. Due to that diversity, it would be diminutive and highly subjective to attempt to group together some of those descriptors, especially when many chose to use multiple terms in each category. Many of the additional identities respondents shared included further specificity around race or ethnicity (e.g., Puerto Rican, Palestinian, American), identities as students or scholars, professional and non-professional vocations (e.g., poet, chef, photographer, youth worker, motorcyclist), religious or spiritual leanings (e.g., converted Jew, Lutheran, agnostic), political frames (e.g., feminist, liberal, Afro-revolutionary, activist), sexual and relational ways of being (e.g., kinky, polyamorous, a really good friend, grandson), and many more (e.g., fat, being perfectly imperfect, rural, survivor of gender-reparative therapy).

I share these here to honor the many ways that trans*masculine college students see themselves and want to be seen by others, including me presumably as the recipient of the submission form's content. The privilege as a researcher to gather, to know, to make choices about *what* I gather and know about any one person is not lost on me in this

moment. Reading over impersonal excel sheet cells, I am attune to the emotions bubbling in my chest and the tears forming in my eyes, as I can almost feel each person trying to reach out (to me, to the world, to themselves) through these words, to be heard, to be seen, to be. It reminds me, yet again, of the responsibility I have to the participants in this study especially, but also to all who indicated a desire to or might have wanted to be a participant, to do all that I can to honor their narratives, their understandings and interpretations of their experiences and identities, and thus attend to matters of trustworthiness and authenticity (discussed later in this chapter).

In order to elicit post-intentional phenomenology's inclination towards "multiplicity, difference, and partiality" (Vagle, 2014, p. 114), 14 individuals were purposively selected from this pool that collectively and individually brought multiple, complex, and variant voices from their intersectionally different social locations. Efforts were particularly made to contact and schedule interviews with students of color, including multi-racial individuals, students who described themselves as upper or upper-middle class (only five total did so) or low or working class, students with different disabilities, and from as many different states, regions, and institution types as possible.

The reasons for these choices are as follows:

- The attempted focus group at the Philadelphia Trans Health Conference (PTHC; described later) was expected to attract more White participants without disabilities. This was based on observations from past attendance at PTHC as to who attends that conference and thus might volunteer for a focus group. Participants of color and/or with disabilities may also prefer

to attend identity-specific tracks and workshops in order to not feel isolated at the largely White and able-bodied conference.

- In terms of class, self-described upper or upper-middle class individuals were sought as the act of that self-description is a rarity in itself. Many more individuals tend to self-describe as being middle class than may actually be based on a combination of various socioeconomic metrics (Morin & Motel, 2012; Shenker-Osorio, 2013). Describing oneself as upper or upper-middle class may thus signal an awareness of and willingness to name privilege, which in turn may elicit discussions on how their privileged identities inform their trans*masculine identities, something that may be amiss for others. Although, more students described themselves as low or working class than as upper or upper-middle class, potentially owing to their current statuses as students, the designation itself is often seen as stigmatized. Therefore, describing oneself as low or working class may at least signal some thoughts or reflections about one's socioeconomic status.
- Different regional and institutional type representation was sought for a diversity of context. This differentiation was easily achieved based on the wide range of regional representation in the interested pool. However, despite students coming from a variety of institutional types (including small publics, large research-intensive publics, small private liberal arts, professional schools, historically women's institutions), there were also

many missing with no respondents from community colleges, other 2-year institutions, or historically men's institutions, and only one from an MSI.

Consent and demographic forms. A consent form (see Appendix G) was provided to study participants prior to beginning the interview or focus group. This form was utilized to introduce the purpose of the study, answer any initial questions, and address the issue of confidentiality. It also confirmed that participation in the study was voluntary and individuals could choose to withdraw at any time. A copy of the consent form was also included in the online screening form (see Appendix E). Additionally, participants were provided with a demographic form to fill out (see Appendix H). The form provided participants the opportunity to list their pronouns and self-describe their identities. The use of correct pronouns, both phonetically and in spelling, is an important and gender-affirming practice that honors trans* people's identities as they see themselves. Similarly, the use of open-ended demographic questions as opposed to pre-determined lists to choose from, allowed participants the opportunity to fully claim their identities and name themselves.

Interviews. Data collection occurred through individual and paired interviews, assisting in a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and for multiple points of entry for participants to engage with the study. One-on-one semi-structured interviews are prime modes of data collection in phenomenological research to gain deep understandings of a topic of study (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Semi-structured interviews combine structured and less structured interview questions (Merriam, 2009). This method allowed me to more flexibly respond to study participants' worldview and to

the emergence of new ideas or questions to investigate on the topic, asking for additional information about the answers they provided and stories they shared. A total of 19 individuals were interviewed once, 14 selected from the initial screening form and an additional five from the attempted focus groups. Individual interviews lasted anywhere from 40 minutes to two hours. One of the two-hour interviews included a 30-minute follow-up at the participant's request in order to talk about identities he had not touched on during the first session. This was the only participant that made a request for a follow-up conversation. Eight of the interviews were conducted in person (three at Creating Change, one at the Upper Midwest QIPOC Conference, two at their home institution, and two at PTHC), and eleven were conducted either via Skype or phone. The in-person interviews were recorded on hand-held audio devices, the Skype interviews were recorded using free MP3 Skype recorder software (no video was recorded), and the phone interviews were recorded on the TapeACall iPhone application. All recordings were sent to a professional transcriber and individual copies of the transcriptions were sent to the participants in separate emails to preserve confidentiality. Participants were asked to provide any corrections to spelling (such as identity-related terms that were not as familiar to the researcher or transcriber or are spelled differently by the participant than it is commonly), as well as given the opportunity to add, clarify, further contextualize, or remove content as desired. Participants were asked to provide these edits as track changes. A number of participants who were able and willing to do so later commented that they enjoyed reading what they had shared and that it gave them an opportunity to reflect on their thoughts and identities even more. Eleven participants provided member

checks, ten of whom suggested edits. These edits included minor changes, such as spellings of names and media titles they had provided, as well as rephrasing and additions. Two participants in particular provided additional notes for context and clarification.

Focus groups. Focus groups function as a dialogic pedagogical sites where participants “are fundamentally charged with producing and transforming reality” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 889) through the naming and interrogation of “lived contradictions that have been rendered invisible by hegemonic power/knowledge regimes” (p. 893). As previously mentioned, despite three attempts to conduct focus groups at different participant-rich environments, no focus groups occurred. Description of these attempts and potential rationale for their non-occurrence is provided in Chapter 6, along with discussion to inform potential future research seeking to use focus groups.

Protocols. The protocols for interviews and focus groups were developed by the researcher (Appendix F). The questions were designed to have a strong orientation to the phenomenon (Vagle, 2014), and overtly leading questions were avoided so as not to influence the direction and contents of responses (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). An introductory question asking participants to share why they agreed to join the focus group or the interview was designed as an easy initial question to increase the comfort level of participants with the researcher (Merriam, 2009). Questions were grouped in categories shaped by the literature review and research questions (Merriam, 2009), such as overall influences of masculinity and intersecting identities respectively. A combination of the Patton and Spradley models (as cited in Madison, 2012) were used to construct the

interview questions. The Patton model was useful in constructing questions regarding opinions, feelings, physiological senses, and sources of knowledge, while the Spradley model primarily guided the construction of descriptive questions to elicit stories and examples.

The interview protocol was piloted by practice-interviewing two individuals who did not fully qualify for the study, so as not to have to dismiss potentially interested participants. One was a trans*masculine-identified person but not a current student, while the other was a doctoral student who was not trans*-masculine identified. Piloting the interview protocol was useful in assessing how much time a potential interview might take, whether questions were generally understandable, and addressing instrumentation and research bias concerns. This was achieved by asking follow up questions after the conclusion of each pilot interview, such as “was there any question that surprised, confused, or upset you.” Piloting with someone who identifies as trans*masculine and is a person who I have a pre-existing relationship with allowed me to practice with someone that would inform me honestly whether questions were asked in limiting or triggering ways, and how the interview as a whole – including my own demeanor and approach – felt for him. Piloting with someone who does not identify as trans*masculine allowed me to focus on whether the questions were clear and understandable, and whether he felt they were asked in a way that did not make him feel ignorant. This was helpful in imagining how trans*masculine students might feel who may still be exploring their identities and masculinity/ies, and might not be as familiar with in-group language. As both

interviewees expressed overall clarity with the questions and comfort with my demeanor, changes were not made to the protocols following the pilot interviews.

The protocols included questions that sought to understand how participants' institutions and college experiences inform their identities and understandings of masculinity. This is both to contextualize higher education's role in these understandings, as well as to draw implications for higher education. The protocol included both broad and specific questions to allow the researcher some flexibility in ascertaining which ones might be most useful in a given interview or focus group. For example, when the broad question of "as you think about the term masculinity, what comes up for you" elicited an uncertain look in an interview, the more specific questions were used to clarify or elicit diverse responses. Although the length of the protocol might appear overly structured, all questions were not asked in all settings. It was important to keep the study's central research questions in mind across participants and sessions, and thus some interview questions were asked consistently such as the overarching bulleted questions (Appendix F). However, it was also important to remain responsive and flexible to participants throughout the study (Vagle, 2014), so as to allow participants to direct the researcher to new areas of inquiry within the topic at hand.

Procedures. Recordings, notes, and transcripts from the interviews are stored in a password protected folder on my personal computer until the study is completed and then they will be destroyed. Audio files were shared with the professional transcriber through Google Drive and accessible only to her and myself. Copies of those files, along with their accompanying transcripts, will be destroyed by the transcriber 3 months after each

transcription was complete. The 3 month window was provided in case my own copies of those files were lost prior to conducting analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred during and after the data collection process. This allowed for field notes and transcriptions from early interviews to inform the study's evolution in an iterative process (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, ongoing analysis aims to avoid data being "unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that need to be processed" (Merriam, 2009, p. 171). Post-intentional phenomenological analysis utilizes a whole-part-whole method that bring variously and contextually situated (i.e., whole) individual focal points (i.e., parts) in dialogue with each other to create "new analytic wholes that have particular meanings in relation to the phenomenon" (Vagle, 2014, p. 97). This involves beginning with an initial holistic reading of the data to get a sense of the whole picture. This is followed by a line-by-line reading of one transcript at a time with "careful note taking and marking of excerpts that appear to contain initial meanings" (Vagle, 2014, p. 98). An additional line-by-line reading helped construct documents with identified excerpts from each participant that contributed to the final analysis.

Informed by post-intentional phenomenology's inclination towards multiplicity and variance (Vagle, 2014), coding was determined to be insufficient and reductive. Thus analysis was driven by a motivation to "avoid being reduced by the desire to create a coherent and interesting narrative that is bound by themes and patterns" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. viii). By utilizing theory, including the conceptual framework and

literature review presented in Chapter 2, to think with and through data, a “dense and multi-layered treatment of data” was achieved and is presented through a visualization of trans*masculine pathways (Appendix I). Subsequent readings of the transcripts and identified excerpts from participants served to continuously revisit the pathways and edit as necessary to ensure they were data informed. Quotes from the transcripts were matched to the pathways as evidence.

Strengths and Limitations

The study has a number of strengths and limitations, many of which can be discussed in terms of validity and reflexivity. The issue of assessing credibility within qualitative research has been taken up by many qualitative researchers with varying, even competing ideas, on what constitutes validity and whether the term is even appropriate outside of a purely positivist approach (Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, & Pierre, 2007). Thus, Guba and Lincoln (1986) proposed the criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity to justify qualitative interpretations. Trustworthiness is analogous to internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. Extending further from these conventional notions is the criterion of authenticity. These two criteria and a further nod to positionality are used to discuss the study’s strengths and limitations.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established through credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability), and neutrality (objectivity). Credibility was established by offering multiple data collection methods, interviews and focus groups. Both of these methods provide rich description of students’ experiences

with and conceptualizations of masculinity. The lack of focus groups in the end did not necessarily reduce the study's credibility, as two of them were transformed to dual interviews – meaning two participants agreed to interview together. During those dual interviews, participants built off each other, providing both common and relating-to-each-other responses, as well as offering alternative ones in reaction to experiences or conceptions they did not share. Recruiting participants from multiple sources (listservs, conferences) and piloting the interview protocol added to the study's credibility. Additionally, the length of time of study across several months increased opportunities for continued data analysis and refinement of ongoing data collection. Member checks were utilized to solicit readings for accuracy on transcripts and on emerging findings with interview and focus group participants (Merriam, 2009). Presentations of initial findings at additional conferences (Gender Odyssey, August 2015 in Seattle; Translating Identity Conference, October 2015 in Vermont) served as additional spaces to solicit reactions and input from other trans*masculine individuals to increase the study's credibility. The ongoing process of reflexivity through the use of a reflexion journal (Vagle, 2014) allowed for continuous self-assessment in terms of my position, biases, and assumptions. The reflexion journal was something I carried with me everywhere I went during the course of study to maximize on opportunities to reflect as they presented themselves. As I shared in the reflexivity section in this chapter, this was particularly useful when discussing fathers, using my reflexion journal to quickly scribble reactions, memories, and emotions that the interview elicited immediately afterwards.

Transferability was ensured through the provision of adequate, rich, and descriptive data to substantiate interpretations and make them applicable in various settings (Merriam, 2009). The use of maximum variation sampling furthered the study's transferability as the range of application increases. Dependability within qualitative research evaluates the consistency of the data collected with the findings. The use of reflexivity and member checking that has already been discussed promoted dependability, as well as neutrality. Additionally, the maintenance of a detailed audit trail of the study's methodology, the researcher's reflections, questions, and decisions, have helped substantiate that the findings make sense given the data that has been collected (Guba & Lincoln, 1986). Two inquiry auditors were recruited from among colleagues familiar with the topic and participant population to conduct verification that procedures were followed through and findings could be substantiated (Guba & Lincoln, 1986). Auditors were given access to a shared auditor folder where they could examine copies of the protocols used, confidential versions of the recruitment and selection excel file, masked versions of the transcripts, and chapters of the dissertation on an ongoing basis. One of the auditors also initiated and participated in monthly in-person check-ins where questions were asked, clarifications on process and progress were made, and reflections were elicited. The other auditor similarly engaged in in-person and online check-ins, initially less consistently, but weekly during the last four to five months of the study.

Authenticity

Authenticity was accounted for through fairness, ontological and educative authenticity, and catalytic authenticity and tactical authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1986). The use of maximum variation sampling and the researcher's own emphasis on elevating marginalized voices and including a wide range of trans*masculine perspectives speaks to the heart of fairness. The literature review showed that trans*masculine students are not adequately engaged in discussions on masculinity. By partaking in this study, the participants' level of awareness through reflection was raised, as expressed in their emails to me following the interviews and transcription member checks, achieving ontological and educative authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

Positionality

My positionality was both a strength and a challenge, the latter being the potential of personal bias and narrative having played a role in misinterpreting other people's stories. This potential was minimized by continuously asking probing and clarifying questions, especially when I found myself assuming I knew what a participant was talking about based on my own experiences, and even more so with participants with whom I had pre-existing direct or indirect relationships. For example, a few of the participants are members of, involved with, or at least very familiar with an organization with which I am affiliated. Individuals become members by participating in a 5-day long intensive leadership retreat held once or twice a year. These retreats are experienced as highly impactful and emotional, as references to these retreats for study participants who have attended them clearly demonstrated. Having attended one of these retreats myself,

including at the same time as one study participant, I made a special effort to ask questions when the organization and the retreats were brought up, so participants could describe them and the impact that they have made on their lives and on their constructions and understandings of masculinity in their own words and effectively communicate unspoken shared meanings.

The strength of my positionality was in accessing a vast network of trans*masculine people, with whom there is a built-in established trust and credibility, including the aforementioned organization. I have attended many of the aforementioned conferences before, including in presenting at them, and have been the subject of a documentary that many in the community have seen. This strength was evident in the participant recruitment and selection process.

Summary

This chapter addressed the study's methodology. The chapter presented the study's research questions, its phenomenological design and epistemology, a description of participants, a summary of recruitment and data collection and analysis methods, and the trustworthiness and authenticity of the study. This chapter also offered multiple opportunities to engage in researcher reflexivity and positionality throughout its design and implementation processes.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS ON THE THRESHOLD

This study sought to answer how, if at all, do trans*masculine college students understand, define, and adopt a masculine identity, as well as how that identity is informed by their various and salient intersecting identities. In this chapter, I introduce the findings of the study and present the first part of those findings – the threshold. The presentation of the findings in the form of a threshold and pathways dispute any notion that there exists a singular trans*masculinity that trans*masculine college students arrive at or even aspire to realize. I utilize pathways as metaphor to describe the limitless paths or possibilities of (trans*)masculinities that the study’s participants took on, pathways that exist within the contexts of hegemony and dominance, not independent of them. This metaphor is illustrated in Appendix I, with an image of trans*masculine pathways that exist within the aforementioned contexts, which are invisible and ubiquitous. The pathways do not remove trans*masculine people or trans*masculinities from the contexts of hegemony and dominance, but rather offer alternative possibilities within them. This chapter focuses on the threshold of dominant masculinities that the 19 participants were exposed to as they navigated their way towards the pathways.

Beginning with understanding how participants talked about dominant masculinities and dominance in masculinities, many of the students also reflected on how

they saw some of that dominance reflected in themselves. Moving forward, the chapter explores the ways that participants named the embodiment of dominant masculinities both at the institutional level and the individual level at their campuses. The chapter ends with some of the (individual) exceptions of non-dominant college masculinities that served as openings to see beyond the threshold of dominance.

Dominant Masculinities or Dominance in Masculinities

Dominant and hegemonic masculinities were often the first things on participants' minds when reflecting on what masculinity means, demonstrating how omni-present and unavoidable they are, particularly as trans*masculine individuals begin considering how to define and construct their own masculinities. Fathers, in particular, and media were the most prevalent conveyors of dominant and hegemonic masculinities beyond an institutional context, with one or both influences showing up in all the interviews. At times, this reality brought up questions for participants in terms of what that meant they needed to do or embody in order to be perceived as they wished to be perceived. This was certainly true for Jay, who said,

I think there is hyper-masculinity sometimes that comes up, you know, initially. You know images, macho this or whatever, all that kind of stuff comes up... I know for me when I first started physically transitioning, a lot of the stuff I saw, like when I looked stuff up online or whatever, a lot of stuff was super masculine. Super hard. And it had me trippin' for a second thinking, oh shit, how I have to get ripped and shit, you know? But I don't know, there's not really... that's not really my thing.

Participants talked about examples of dominant masculinities in terms of others around them – many of them their fathers – and in thinking about masculinity in the abstract. Some also reflected on the ways that they noticed dominance and internalized sexism showing up within themselves, whether consciously or unconsciously, or as

others prescribed onto them. Often, but not always, participants talked about these dominant masculinities as something they did not desire for themselves or were uncomfortable around.

Fathers showed up as conveyors of dominant masculinities. This transmission differs for trans*masculine individuals from cisgender men. Jack reflected on how learning about masculinity for himself, and possibly other trans*masculine individuals, was not as straightforward as he believed it to be for many cisgender men.

Trans* men have this experience [of learning about masculinity] outside of the parental relationship... I mean, here we are doing this journey on our own, most likely, and having the experiences on our own... sort of having to be the person who is experiencing it, and an anthropologist all at the same time. I had so many times that I was analyzing the world around me almost daily from an anthropological lens... “What are they doing, what’s that guy doing... what’s in common... how is it that they have respect from this male cashier, and I don’t... what is it that is getting them respect from this male cashier – is it the way they are standing, is it the way they are talking, is it the way they shake his hand?” I would think about these things all the time and I still do.

This anthropological approach that Jack described perhaps lends itself to the manner in which many participants talked about what they did pick up on from their fathers. The constant mode of questioning and evaluating that Jack described allowed for a more critical examination of their fathers’ masculinities, rather than an uncritical adoption. Blake exemplified this when they talked about their father.

I so much don’t want to become my father and don’t want to emulate that same kind of masculinity. To me he’s very emotionally closed off and the only emotion is anger or like being upset. It’s interesting because I see a lot of myself, I see a lot of him in myself and I think that’s part of why I’ve been so intentional in self-reflection about the type of masculinity I want to embody.

Others had similar resistive responses to being compared to their fathers. Daniel mentioned how “people tell me I look like my dad all the time and I’m like, that’s true,

but not interesting to me, let's not talk about it.” He described his father's and paternal grandfather's masculinity as a “lazy masculinity, which is like I'm lying in bed, my wife should get me everything” and exclaimed how “I don't ever want to be those guys and I think that happens to a lot of us [trans*masculine people]. We get these bad examples of masculinity and we're like I don't want to do that.” Daniel's rejection of his grandfather's masculinity was also tied to him being “a White man growing up in the South in the mid part of the century, so his racism is really tied to his masculinity, and that's frustrating to me.” Thus, Daniel sought to also distance himself from his grandfather's Whiteness and racism by rejecting his masculinity.

Seth similarly described their father as “very emotionally weak. He is easy to anger at times and he doesn't know how to navigate his emotions. It's something I associate with masculinity, a really big negative aspect of it.” This was in contrast to associating femininity with being “emotionally strong,” like his mother, which Seth talked about admiringly and more like themselves than their father's masculine and weak emotionality. Eli talked about the impact adopting his father's personality had on him and how that has shifted since his childhood.

I think because of my dad, it is kind of the stoic personality that can weather anything. Doesn't show a lot of emotions which I was actually discussing with someone a while back about expressing more. I definitely, since coming to college, express more. I was very reserved and quiet more as a kid... I look back at it and I'm like, yeah it was a little toxic... that oh I have to be able to withstand anything sort of thing that, that kind of attitude.

Earl talked about this toxicity and how his “learned behaviors” harm himself when he does not articulate or communicate his feelings to others. He said, “...growing up as far as something's wrong, just be like ‘whatever, it's fine’ or like my feelings are

hurt and not really talking about that.” This meant that what ailed him was not addressed and he was left carrying the hurt around. He attributed these “learned behaviors” to masculinity’s focus on doing and action rather than taking the time to reflect or emote.

I feel like growing up in my family and also in my community it was very ‘guys do this.’ They work and they provide, they weren’t very emotional or talkative. Kind of had a front; if something was going on or something was wrong you just handle your business. You didn’t stop and talk about how you feel or if you’re tired or sick or whatever.

The focus on action over communication was expressed in Coffee Bean’s father’s masculinity as well, which they described as “a really specific kind of Mexican masculinity.... My dad was always like the old school stoic kind of ‘men don’t talk, men just do,’ you know what I mean?” Similar to the connections between masculinity and lack of communication that Earl and Coffee Bean made, Bastian also encapsulated and attributed that connection to his father. Bastian believed that the automation with which his father approached masculinity and the gender roles he uncritically and obligingly took on possibly led him down a career path he did not desire.

I don’t think my dad really thinks about [masculinity], I think he just does things. I don’t even think he gave that much thought into the field he pursued. He became a lawyer and I had an ex ask him once... why he decided to study law and he had the saddest expression on his face. It was like, nobody had ever asked him what he wanted to do, and they just kind of said well this is what you’re supposed to do. So he never really answered her.

Jack associated this connection between masculinity and the lack of emotional expression to professionalism when he stated,

You feel this pressure to be strong and less emotional on the exterior, yet still have feelings. I’m not saying men don’t have feelings, but still that pressure to be like, ‘I’m dealing with all these other things in my life, but I’m not going to talk about it. I’m going to keep it professional.’

Thus, Jack first differentiated between having feelings and expressing them, believing men capable of the former and less likely to do the latter, as well as bringing in professionalism. To disentangle masculinity from men, Jack also posited lack of emotional expression as something that can be embodied by various masculine individuals, not just cisgender men. For example, he brought up “the butch lesbian who always has her arms folded like this [across the chest], who you can’t ever have a real conversation with because she is always trying so hard to be stoic.”

The pressure to be seen as professional clashed with the inauthenticity that Jones felt with his presentation as a feminine woman during his one-year internship at a dentist’s office. He talked about how difficult that year was for him and how being professional,

that in itself makes it difficult for me to interact with people and authority figures, but there are added layers of inauthenticity because I have to be a girl with them but at the time I couldn’t pinpoint why it was so difficult to connect with my coworkers and people around, but it was because I felt very restricted. I think it relates back to gender. It was tougher than I think it would have been for other [meaning cisgender] people.

In addition to having to manage the pressure of expressing an inauthentic-to-him femininity, Jones was also having to contend with showing up as professional *and* feminine. This may have furthered his disconnect with his colleagues, as masculinity is interpreted as professional more so than femininity. Jack seemed to feel from his father and other men that masculinity carries with it certain – unspoken sometimes – gendered expectations or stereotypes around career. Only for him, these expectations were not quite as unspoken.

I get a lot of pressure from masculinity financial culture, that practicality and financial stability are huge things that are part of the values in masculine

identified culture people... My dad, and my brother, and all the men in my life are always like, 'What is your career, what are you doing with your life?' That is their focus... it's their world.

Some participants' fathers did model more positive or desirable representations of masculinity in their behaviors and expressions. Incidentally, the students who shared having these positive examples were all students of color, like Jay and Charles. Jay described his father as,

a masculine person but he's not very hyper masculine at all. The way he expresses himself, like his gender expression or whatever it's... I think it's a model around masculinity. I don't know he's just a very chill kind of guy. I never really heard him call out women or be ridiculous about the way he spoke about women or anything like that... He listened to Sade and Anita Baker and shit, you know what I'm saying? My dad... wouldn't oversexualize or hypersexualize them. He would look at women and we could be driving and he would be like, 'You see that woman at the bus stop? She is so beautiful; she is such a beautiful woman. Black women are so beautiful,' you know, stuff like that... He was never like, 'Oh, look at her ass.'

Charles also talked about his stepfather's expressions of masculinity as being non-normative and in contrast to other participants' fathers who were described as "closed off" emotionally.

Then I think of my stepdad, who while is very masculine, he has 'feminine' traits. He's very emotional, he cries all the time and he's such an 'emotional man' that sometimes I think he's embarrassed because of it. If anything I so admire that because I'm like, this is also masculinity.

Representations of non-dominant masculinities were the exceptions to how participants described their fathers, with only three of them (Jay, Charles, and Mohammed) talking about their fathers in this way. Most talked about their fathers' masculinities as embodying dominance, lack of emotionality, and being toxic or unhealthy. This pattern was also present in discussions about media and institutions, with both readily and almost exclusively displaying hegemonic masculinity at structural levels

with few individual exceptions. Some of the dominant traits were internalized by participants, at times consciously, and this is discussed in the next section, as well as how participants negotiated or resisted that internalization.

Dominance Within

Not all participants necessarily saw themselves always resisting traditional and dominant masculinities. James in particular often talked about willingly and consciously adopting traits and expectations associated with masculinity. For example, while Jack did not seem to appreciate what he called “masculinity financial culture,” James gravitated towards it and the image of “the husband who brings home the bacon kind of things, that masculinity is being the bread winner. Being able to support your family even if it’s not [your passion].” He saw his father’s ability to financially support the family, versus his mother who was a stay-at-home parent during his childhood, as a model he wished to follow, including physiologically. Since he considered his father to have “a lot of power and status at his job” and is “seen as the man,” James took “a lot of social cues from him. Like how to walk into a room and how to present as a powerful male... So I mimic some of these habits, good and bad.” He attributed his ideas around gender to his upbringing. He said that “I’m very, I don’t want to say big on gender roles – you know that sounds bad – but I definitely think they’re comforting to me. Maybe that’s just the way I was raised.”

The desire for affirmation in his masculinity played into how James engaged with social media as well, posting pictures of himself on Tumblr, particularly on trans* sites, because “I’m really just looking for accolades and to see how many likes I can get,

because that is self-assuring.” Additionally, James attributed his competitive nature, both athletically and academically, to his masculinity, contrasting it to how he saw female classmates’ performance in the classroom. This was also despite being on athletic teams with girls, who may also have been competitive and may or may not have identified as masculine.

That was a very big deal to me, to be athletic, to be competing. We won states when I was in soccer, we went to states for softball, I was really competitive and really into winning. I think that was a masculinity thing like being the best at whatever you did and I feel like being expected to be like... Like guys are expected to be smarter in school, you know what I’m saying? Like, girls don’t raise their hands in class as much because you don’t want to be smarter than the boys and kind of play dumb kind of thing.

During the course of the interview, James reflected how some of his behaviors, expressions, and attitudes around gender, including his propensity towards dismissing passion over occupational practicality and his competitive nature, might compensate for what he believed he lacked. When asked by his academic advisor why he majored in supply chain management, when he did not seem to enjoy it, he responded that “it’s a status thing.” He elaborated and said,

there are some things about my masculinity that I can’t control. Like I can’t grow a beard. If I start taking hormones and I don’t grow a beard, I will be so sad. So things that I can’t control, I can’t grow a beard, I can’t make my features look any less feminine. I have a pretty round face. There’s not much I can do. So one of the things I can control is putting myself in a position where I have status in my job, and I make good money and I can be the bread winner... I think the idea that status is important is because it’s one of the few things I can control personally.

James recognized that some of the behaviors he adopted were at times problematic, but kept going back to not having the physical characteristics he wanted that would clearly mark him as a man. He reflected on a time he watched himself on a video recording and how,

everything about my outer person screams girl so I think I overcompensate to try and mask that. I dominate conversations, I try and answer every question in class, I work out a ton, I push myself to excel academically, professionally, I try to come off as a stud, I try to see how many girls I can get to like me. Kinda fucked, but it's about changing what I can.

It was almost as if Earl was speaking to James, when he said, "I definitely think to the younger me I would say there's no need to overcompensate for whatever it is that you feel you are lacking in the realm of masculinity." It was not always clear what aspects of James' portrayal of masculinity was only for compensation sake, which aspects he would readily adopt if he did not have that concern, or some combination of both. What was clear, was that traditional masculinity was "comforting" to him and not something he wished to resist at this time. James was also not the only person to talk about enjoying attributions of traditional or dominant masculinity. In addition to family and upbringing, media often came up as one of the influencers of how one understood masculinity or manhood and internalized dominance. Daniel described media's portrayal of masculinity as "[shoved] down our throats, which is a masculine thing to do." The media's representation of masculinity for him was "very straight... often White, able bodied, has a beard, is relatively tall, bachelor sort of image." While Daniel expressed the masculine images portrayed by media with disdain, others found resonance in certain representations. A film enthusiast, Coffee Bean often reverted to cinematic representations of masculinity, such as the first time they watched *The Godfather* (Ruddy & Coppola, 1972).

I was ten when I watched it and I watched it with my brother and I looked up to my brother so much, like I just wanted to *be* my brother... And not just that, but the fact that in that movie... power, right, was always framed as being a man's thing and I think I wanted some of that.

This did not just show up in movies meant for adults. For Jones, it was dominant narratives of strength, action, in addition to power, as inherently masculine that drew him to certain cartoons as a child.

Red Ranger was my favorite growing up. I secretly wanted to be Red Ranger and even animated movies like Toy Story, I wanted to be Buzz or Woody. I just wanted to be like an action star. Just any kind of male main character I identified a lot with I think. Red Ranger just seemed like he could handle everything. He was buff and it's hard to explain. I just liked his man-ness, his buff-ness, his action, his super hero powers, I guess his gender.

In addition to gravitating towards masculinity, some students talked about the adoptions of certain ideas and behaviors being about distancing themselves from femininity. Mohammad talked about internalizing sexist and binary gender messaging growing up, which he attributed to not fitting into the female category and experiencing a “very [binary] gendered” upbringing.

So for a long time I'm not going to lie... I would even have internalized sexism growing up. I would have a lot of like, 'girls can't do this!' So that I would be like, 'I'm not a girl, I'm not a girl. I can beat all these guys because I'm not a girl.'

Mohammad went on to talk about how this also translated into him having internalized heterosexism and cissexism, which were not challenged until college when he began meeting people, including trans* people, who modeled and expressed many different gendered ways of being and thinking, and intellectually through a queer theory class during his sophomore year. Even as many attempted to resist dominance, they reflected on how others would impose it on them. Some shared about how dominance showed up in their masculinities and how they benefited from masculine/male privilege. Gabriel often felt this imposition coming from cisgender people who attempted to display acceptance of his trans* identity.

I remember when I had just come out and I was at this event where a lot of my good family friends were at, and they were all trying to be really accepting but overly so. So they were like ‘oh, you’re a man now, you have to view all these masculine things, like it’s okay to burp and not say excuse me, and you can do all this stuff.’ And I was like what if I don’t want to, what if I don’t want that to be masculinity, what if I want more of a gentlemanly masculinity?

Similarly, Mohammad already saw and anticipated others’ interactions with and expectations of him to change, the more others perceived him as masculine or as a man.

I’ve noticed like more respect by men – cisgender men especially. More respect by just people in general, and I know that once I fully transition I’m going to be viewed as... I just know that more expectations would be put on me in terms of like masculinity. Being brave, being tough, being all these macho things that people tell us, tell men, to be.

At times the expectations imposed were re-appropriated and embraced, or at least welcome, such as when Kyle talked about the impact being seen as masculine had on his confidence.

I feel like I’ve become more confident in speaking. It’s embracing my masculinity and feeling like what I’m saying actually matters, the things I’m saying are actually important, feeling that people are listening. Even though I am aware of how much I’m speaking, I find the things that I do say have more impact than they did before.

Similarly, Charles experienced a shift in how people responded to him in his role as a stage manager for the campus theater when he needs “to get everyone’s attention” and “to a certain extent I’m listened to more now that I’m identified as male [and] knowing what it was like when I identified as female.”

Mohammad talked about these shifting expectations being a central reason in wanting to participate in this study, in order to intentionally take time to think about what masculinity means to him, to better prepare himself to challenge or resist some of these imposed expectations. Despite acknowledging these pressures on himself, Mohammad

also reflected on how much this was in protection of and couched in the valuing of masculinity over femininity, and how that makes his experiences as a trans*masculine person “easier” when compared to trans*women.

When I came out to my dad as a trans* guy he accepted it more than me saying like I’m a queer female. And a lot of it has to do with heteronormativity I guess is the word to say. Because he’d rather me be a passing male. Because male of course by default, being male is better in his eyes... Women are seen as less valued in our society, in like a lot of societies... Because I’m FTM [female-to-male], men are like, ‘Yeah, of course you want to be a guy.’ Right? But then when like [someone is] MTF [male-to-female] men are like, ‘What the fuck?’ It confuses them, because why the fuck would you want to be female or whatever?

This devaluing of femininity and womanhood was attributed by Peter to why he sees a disproportionate provision of resources towards trans*masculine people as compared to trans*feminine people. He remarked, “I definitely think there are a lot less resources aimed at trans*feminine people in general just because society you know, thinks that masculinity is something that needs to be aspired to and femininity is not.”

Even as awareness of one’s masculine privilege rises to the surface, some students talked about not knowing how to respond without asserting masculine dominance.

Bastian talked about a gender studies class he was in as an undergraduate when another man in the class was,

talking about sexism and whether women that are wearing skimpy clothes are like asking for it... I really wanted to deck him. I kind of wish that I had, but then again that would just be a different [negative] representation of masculinity right there if I had.

Some students also mused about the grey areas of privilege as they experienced it, that it was not always something that could be understood as either in play or not in play. Privilege associated with gender was complicated by intersecting identities and by others’ perceptions. Stephen talked about not always knowing how others were reading him in

terms of masculinity, but also how their perceptions of his other identities influenced that reading.

But it's hard to suss out what is masculinity, what is people's perception of your sexual orientation, what is your size, what's your age and how those things all impact the way you are read. I definitely think that more feminine men are read as younger or at least treated as younger and I guess I might say that I mean like aren't taken as seriously. I think smaller men aren't taken as seriously, because there is that association with being less masculine.

Here Stephen was also insinuating that some small and feminine-perceived trans*masculine people may share similar experiences with some small and feminine-perceived cisgender men. Almost as if building off of Stephen's thoughts, Peter talked about how others' perceptions complicated his understanding of his own and trans*masculine individuals' privilege. Similar to Stephen, how others read him had a lot to do with it.

I think that trans* men have male privilege once they pass... But at the same time I'm still terrified to go out and walk alone at night. I get told to smile and like I'm still afraid of cis men acting on me in a way that they would to a cis woman. Some people are like, that's transphobia but I'm like, they don't know I'm trans* so it's like eh. I feel like there's a lot of grey area and I don't know... do I have male privilege? I know I'm going to have male privilege once I start passing as male regularly and people are going to start treating me as male but I don't know... I try to stay out of those arguments since I haven't really formed my opinion fully. But sometimes I'm like – well it's not really fair to say I have the same privileges as cis men when cis men still treat me like a cis woman.

As participants discussed passing, there was often a sigh in their voices, or a look in their eyes, as if to lament even the use of the word. Jack rolled his eyes whenever he brought up passing, but also acknowledged finding comfort at times in the privilege associated with passing.

I think it's easy for me in – and this is again going back to a passing privilege aspect – it's easy for me to *not think about it* in spaces that are heterosexual. I don't think it's even possible to completely forget about it, but it's one of those

things where it's just like nice to not have to think about these things. It's a huge privilege but it's also nice that I don't have to think about it. That's the nature of privilege.

There was also recognition that some trans*masculine individuals could experience masculine/male privilege in settings where they were among the gender minority. Even in a field like education that Bastian described as being “heavily female dominated,” he remembered getting “a lot more teacher interviews – because I was male – than a lot of my friends, the girls I went to class with did.” He attributed that to hegemonic masculinity, and receiving many more opportunities than his peers who were women, despite – or perhaps because of – there being far more women in his program than men. This was a concern for Eli. As someone going into chemical engineering, which he described as slowly becoming “female dominated and then... seen upon as a lesser field,” he was conscious of his masculinity as he contemplated “what is my masculinity going to do for that? I'm in a field that is becoming female dominated but is also becoming less respected or something. Is there anything I can do to help?” He wanted to think about how he might leverage his masculinity and privilege to push back against this process without centering himself and thus masculinity in doing so, but was unsure of how.

Different settings and contexts also influenced how some participants exerted dominant behaviors or expressions as a defense mechanism. This included whether one had a support system within a particular setting. The move from an environment where RJ felt supported and affirmed to one where they felt alone and experienced elevated levels of cissexism triggered an elevation in their performance of masculinity to counteract that. In discussing their transition to a new region and a new institution, RJ noted how they,

felt like I needed to perform [masculinity] a lot more than what I was ever comfortable or used to performing. I kind of went through this moment or moments of ‘Let me up my game.’ That sort of became toxic for me and exhausting to do. I started realizing even the way of thinking was changing for me, and the way I was engaging other people. By the way I was engaging other people, I mean other males; it was changing. I was becoming like a bro, and like that kind of bro language, that I was never very used to or keen to, or really exposed to as much. It’s not like I was envious of their relationships to each other or their way of communicating or the way of expressing themselves. I was like, I wanted that liberty... Being in the South draws out that male energy in me in a very different, fucked up way then the north does I guess, or the Midwest, whatever.

Earl talked about showing up in “not my best masculine self all the time,” in certain contexts, such as at barber shops. He described being not his “best masculine self” as either, “one, because I participate in [not positive masculinity] or, two, because something inappropriate is said and I don’t say anything to the contrary.” As an example, Earl described a day at a barber shop when other men were talking about a famous trans*woman who one person found attractive and “just like the whole inappropriate conversation like, man I can’t believe that’s a dude.” As the barber shop banter about the trans*woman continued (“people... being like, oh shit man you just never know these days you just never know”), Earl became conscious of himself as a trans* person there and unsure of how to intervene.

I feel like in those situations, like I said I didn’t participate in it, but then I also didn’t participate in it. Those conversations when they happen I think are really weird to be around and really weird to hear. Like definitely weird to try and figure out how to handle that.

Earl talked about the significance of barber shops as places of – specifically Black in this instance – masculine bonding, and how that desire to bond can at times allow for some things to go unchallenged or unspoken so as not to harm the relationship or become an outsider. Whether part of Earl’s consciousness or not, this fear of rocking the boat,

particularly in a culturally significant context, might be one he shares with many cisgender men who may also wish to intervene or express discomfort at microaggressive banter. Similarly, Blake considered how being seen as masculine can both strengthen connections with other masculine people, while feeling like those connections are based on an unspoken allegiance around toxic masculinity. When talking about a cis classmate, Blake remarked,

In that moment I think I realized that we had come a long way in our relationship even if it was kind of fucked up that part of why we had come a long way is that he understood me as part of this masculine brotherhood.

Trans*masculine students do not get to take being read as masculine for granted. Jack talked about the instability of this reading in the context of experiencing privilege as a condition of being perceived as masculine and cisgender. He expressed that “the more masculine/butch I appear in appearance, the more perceived power people give me. Then the more shocked they are when I tell them that I’m a trans* person... then all that power disappears.” The possibility of that power or recognition as masculine being taken away in an instant can get in the way of speaking up against misogyny. Bastian experienced this sensation at a party during his undergraduate years, when he went out to the porch where a group of guys were hanging out,

and this was before testosterone. One of them started ragging on another guy’s girlfriend saying a lot of sexist comments. The first thing that went through my head was, ‘oh my gosh I passed this is awesome!’ Then the next thing that went through my head was, ‘oh god this is what they talk about?’ So I mean, in that respect I was not very grateful for the masculinity, but the second the girl walked out onto the porch the conversation stopped. It was kind of, I stopped going to parties after that. I wasn’t really into the party scene that much anyway. But it was kind of an epiphany, a horrible epiphany of oh wow, this is how blatant sexism and horrible comments are, wow.

What many students were discovering was that to be recognized as masculine came with certain expectations around performance and silence that were not always welcome. However, being new to these expectations meant they did not always have the tools or skills to push back. The desire to be recognized as masculine often meant figuring out how to balance articulation of masculinity with attempting to not assert dominance. Jones described this balance as he talked about how he shifted,

[m]y gait, like how I walk. Slight mannerisms like if I'm sitting on the bus, I just have a way of carrying myself that kind of signals that I'm a dude. Yeah I don't know how to explain. It's kind of taking up a little more space. Not like intrusively so, but just a little more space than a woman would.

Jones may have learned about these physical expressions of masculinity as an observing anthropologist, as Jack had offered up earlier as a common trans*masculine endeavor.

Blake on the other hand found themselves wondering if trying to manage that balance had somehow triggered a discomfort in them that led them to question the source of that discomfort.

There was this one moment where we were at this event where I knew some people and not other people and I was sitting on the floor and the person I was dating was sitting in a chair and was patting my head or something in a way that made me feel really uncomfortable. I was thinking about why that made me so uncomfortable and its relation to masculinity and I think being concerned about the way other people perceived me in that relationship and in actions like that. And the power dynamics and if that bothers me then isn't it fucked up that I want to be the one in power?

Thus, Blake's desire to be seen authentically as themselves was pushing up against the type of masculine person they wanted to be, one that did not rely on power and dominance to be recognized as masculine. In addition to thinking about that balance within themselves, some participants also mused about how other trans*masculine people were or were not managing that balance well. Jay very simply said, "I have a lot of, not a

lot, but quite a few of my friends who are other trans* guys, Black trans* guys, who are kind of somewhat oblivious to sexism and patriarchy.” He attributed their obliviousness to growing “up with dudes you know, and that’s how they grew. Hearing the same bullshit and passing it on and perpetuating it. I know it feels good to be in that comradery too.” Bastian mused about how,

a lot of trans* men go through kind of phases... whereas you’re kind of posturing a little bit in the beginning and then you kind of just settle down and be like, wait I can just be me. Then some people are still posturing later on.

Charles recalled a peer in his program a few years older than himself with whom he did not have a good rapport that might have been someone that was “still posturing” as Bastian described.

I wish that personally I had known about his trans*ness because I was trying to figure out why he was so set on doing everything and the way he made his presentation. He had to know everything, he had to be everything and he wouldn’t ask for help and all these types of things. It was like, what is wrong with this person! Like why are they, they do not trust me to help them and they’re making this really difficult.... [when I found out he was trans*] I was like, oh okay! That explains a lot. That essentially in my opinion is why you’re trying to pee all over everything and you know, assert your dominance.

Part of what motivated some of these students to reflect on how they expressed their masculinity lay in the recognition of how women in particular perceived them differently. Jack reflected on how being seen as masculine by women comes with markers of danger that did not used to be there. It is this *shift* in perception that cisgender men do not experience that allowed Jack to think about his masculinity and his presence.

At night I was walking down the sidewalk and passing [women], down the same sidewalk. I had this ‘Aha!’ moment. This woman was walking towards me, and I was walking down the sidewalk towards her... and she crossed four lanes of traffic to walk on the other side of the sidewalk. I was like, ‘Oh, right.’ So that was one moment where I really had to think about my masculinity. I had to think, ‘Wow, I’m really being threatening right now...’ because I had a hoodie and my

hood was up. You know like... and it's night, and I'm looking like a male... you know, those decisions I don't think cis men make.

Concerned with hyper-masculinity, some found solace in not having been socialized into manhood growing up, such as Charles who said, "I feel like if I had been raised a boy I would have absorbed more of [hyper] masculinity than I did having been born a girl." He believed this to be the case because of how he had been taught to think of masculinity and femininity.

I see masculinity as not femininity in the sense of taking up space and being loud and being protective and being strong and all of these other things that have nothing to do with masculinity, but they do because that is the way in which it has been presented to me my whole life... Women are supposed to sit in the corner and be quiet and serve and all that type of crap.

James also admitted that he would have embodied a "bad" masculinity if he was a cis man, comparing himself to his institution's "textbook examples" of "fucking frat guys... who drink too much, go to games, yell." He went on to say "that if I was like a cis guy, I would probably be that douchebag... It's bad, my brother [referring to his poetry fraternity brother] knows." Instead James preferred to see himself as being on the "better side than the predator frat guys who just yell at girls on weekends" and believed others see him "as kind of nerdy, don't go out much... reads books in his spare time, plays guitar, writes poetry." He associated with peers and professors, "cis guys who are... very forward thinking... who really extend themselves to help you and they try to understand all student issues, so more gender issues or feminine issues."

Institutionalized and College Masculinities

James' conceptions of what "bad" masculinity looks like, particularly in the context of college, mirrored many of his fellow participants' reflections. Participants had

specific conceptualizations and experiences of dominant masculinities as they showed up on their campuses as embodied among their peers and other individuals, but often as reflections of the institutions themselves. Thus, institutionalized masculinities were as much about identity, as they were about institutional discourse. Jack named the pervasiveness of masculinity at his institution, and how it played out within the Deaf community on campus, as related to power.

I think masculinity is not something that's normally talked about at [my institution]. It's the assumed norm, because it comes with power. Even in the Deaf community, who (sic) is an oppressed minority, in this Deaf community you have a system of power... Men have much more power than women because of the patriarchy obviously... There is a lot more work here for people who are feminine identified, whether that's queer organizing, or domestic violence. That is actually a huge issue at [my institution]; domestic violence and sexual assault on campus is like out of control.

Thus the devaluing of femininity and feminine people, including women, at the institutional level leads to the prioritizing of issues that concern masculine people, and specifically cisgender men. This mirrored how Mohammad and Peter talked about the differential values placed on masculinity versus femininity in society at large and within the trans* community. Thus, despite the media attention on campus sexual assaults and violence, Jack is naming masculinity's power as the barrier that those engaged in organizing against sexual assault, relationship violence, and rape culture as a whole come up against time and time again.

RJ similarly spoke to institutional masculine culture and rape culture when they said,

Currently, like, this is horrible to say but the culture of [my institution], masculinity equals rape. It's bad shit; it's fucked up to say. There's been so much conversation among female identified, female bodied, some men but not too much, around sexual assault in higher education, particularly on [my campus]. These conversations need to happen around men too, but I feel there is a lack of inclusion, a lack of them feeling they can come out to these things, or why should

they even care. There is a culture of, ‘Who gives a shit,’ or ‘She was asking for it.’

The institutionalized framing of rape and sexual assault as only a women’s issue and men “as the definite enemy,” left Kyle feeling conflicted about his role and positionality in these conversations as a man of transgender experience.

It’s difficult because it’s like I want to be able to engage in these conversations, but not knowing how to engage in these conversations. Not knowing how to balance the amount of space I take up. Especially since I am like a hardcore feminist. I believe in the equality of genders. Knowing what that feels like to be seen and treated as a woman, but also transitioning to a more masculine manhood or whatever. I find it hard to find space for me to be able to have these conversations and not feel invalidated by them... I don’t really know because I want to be loud, but I don’t want to be demonized. I also don’t want to be invisible and not say anything. I just have to pick and choose my battles. But most of the times, I feel like whichever battle I choose I lose.

Kyle’s description of his choice as being a battle speaks to just how deeply the gender binary is embedded in and harms campus conversations on sexual assault. He is stating that there are basically only two ways for students to participate in and be portrayed by these efforts – either as victims and survivors who are cisgender women or as perpetrators who are cisgender men. There are two sides to the “battle” and he cannot find himself on either side.

The visualization of institutionalized masculinity and rape culture, also showed up at the interpersonal level. James believed that his perspective as a trans male allowed him to read interactions between men and women differently than his fraternity brother, a cis man. He described an example of when the two of them were walking around campus around Halloween, and his observations of a group of college men and women.

So we see this group interacting and we keep walking. I turn to him and I’m like nervous, he was like, ‘why do you feel nervous?’ or something. And I was like, ‘did you not see what just happened?’ To my brother who has only seen the male

perspective and identifies as masculine, looking at that he just thought these guys were trying to take these girls home in a very like, douchy but like a ‘yo you want to come back with us’ kind of way. In a guy being a guy kind of way. But the way I saw it, as someone who has been a female in that position, but is now identifying as a guy and trying to act like guys act, I saw this as super rapey, and that he was forcing himself way too hard because I know what it’s like to be a girl in that position... So it was weird, for me now trying to be masculine how I viewed that as an unsafe scenario if I was the girl and I know how those guys’ actions are making them feel and why the guy’s acting that way. Versus my brother just always being the guy in that situation just trying to sleep with the girl. So that was very socially, I feel like I notice shit like that more now, like how guys are interacting with girls and how a lot of time it’s super unsavory.

Gabriel also talked about recognizing how rape culture impacts interpersonal interactions and women’s perceptions of him and his masculinity, despite his own self-concept.

I do have to be conscious of my masculinity I think because sometimes I’m like I know I’m a trans* guy, I know what I’m *not* going to do but then I’m like, wait, unfortunately a lot of women on college campuses are afraid of sexual assaults and things like that and I have to remember... I have my EMT license and so if I see someone who’s drunk I’ll be like, ‘hey are you okay’ or something like that, but then I have to be conscious of things people might assume that my intentions are.

The connection between institutionalized masculine and rape cultures was just one way in which participants understood how their institution portrayed a dominant and privileged masculinity. Trans*masculine students of color in particular talked about the Whiteness of institutional masculinity. Charles remarked that “We are in the rural Northwest so for me when I think of masculinity specifically here I see straight, White male-bodied, male-identified men.” This was despite the fact that Charles described his institution as inclusive for LGBTQ students and students of color. He balanced those two conflicting perspectives by sharing his belief that,

It’s sometimes a veil and it makes it seem like it’s more than it actually is. Because you have those small groups of ... well we have the women’s resource center, we have the multicultural resource center, we have the queer resource center and we have all of these things and we put on all of these events but I think

sometimes that, I don't want to say it's a distraction, but it makes [the campus] seem like something that it's not. I'm hoping that my university will be able to kind of get better at that, because there are a lot of strong male presences on our campus. We have a football team and all of those other groups of traditionally male bodied, male identified people that can sometimes take up a lot of space.

For Charles, the spaces he named did not shift the institution's identity, but rather provided the institution with a sort of disguise that masked its institutionalized Whiteness and heteropatriarchy. The disguise also did not structurally change what the student population looked and felt like for Charles. Similarly, the first thing that came to Earl's mind as well when he thought about his institution was,

...White. It's really, really White and as far as specifically about masculinity there are not a lot of men on campus that look like me. There are not a lot of men in my class or my program that look like me. So when I think of masculinity with regards to my school I think of White guys.

That meant that Earl did not consider anyone at the institution as someone that could fulfill an influential role in his life when it came to masculinity, because he did not see himself in those around him and,

it really sucks. It's seriously... I can't tell you ... For me when I think about masculinity I'm thinking about people that I can somehow identify with and it's really difficult for me to identify with a lot of the guys that I see on campus. Seriously, on a daily basis I might see one person that looks like me, if that.

Kyle also did not feel connected to faculty or "any of the authority" at his institution, minimally engaging with any of them as needed. Beyond selective peers who were "there throughout my transition" and "allowed me to figure myself out," he did not see his institution as having played any influential role on his masculinity. When it came to university employees, he stated that "There is a lot of respectability politics in being a teacher and staff member and stuff like that. And I don't respect that. I don't respect respectability politics." For Kyle, respectability looked like having "to approach

[teachers] a certain way” and his “straightforward, candid, very sarcastic” style not “[vibing] very well in an authority institutional setting.” As a Black individual, respectability harkened a particular distrust for Kyle. Jay also disconnected himself from his institution, commenting on that reality’s impact when he said, “It’s like people [in higher education] don’t have expectations of you as a Black man.” He compared what he learned about Whiteness and belonging during his first tenure as an undergraduate student to the choices he made as a returning non-traditional student, when he talked about his on-campus engagement or lack thereof.

I don’t live on campus, I don’t fuck with campus, I don’t have anything to do with campus. I just go in, get my classes and go back to the south side with the other Black people and I’m good, you know what I’m saying? That’s what I do. So I don’t really... I’m immune to the bullshit, you know?

This intimate integration of campus masculinity and Whiteness for Jay also translated to observing a singular version of White masculinity as compared to masculinities of color. He commented that, “for the White folks you have the bros or whatever going on. So there is more diversity amongst students of color, amongst men of color in terms of how they express themselves.”

In addition to race and racism, institutionalized masculinity was often quickly paralleled with athletics and Greek life on campus, and this parallel was rarely expressed positively. At Coffee Bean’s institution, these elements, along with class, all coalesced into “dude-bro” masculinity. For them,

a dude-bro is a White fraternity dude, upper class, of course. And that upper class is deeply tied to their Whiteness. I think of someone who is in ‘Fiji’ [Phi Gamma Delta] and ‘Sammy’ [Sigma Alpha Mu]. I think of someone who is obnoxious, someone who is entitled. And that’s White masculinity, right, because for me, especially coming to [my institution], it was hard for me to disentangle Whiteness from upper class-ness.... And when we get to masculinity of color, because

there's a very clear difference, a very clear divide between the two, I think of some of the Black dudes I know on campus, that most of them, unfortunately, I know because they're football players and how fucked up it is that most of the Black students that you recruit and that you give scholarships to are the ones that are going to make you money as football stars or as basketball players.

Similar to Coffee Bean's assignment of Whiteness to "dude-bro masculinity,"

Jones associated masculinity among his Asian peers with proximity to Whiteness. He compared two Asian cisgender and heterosexual men in one of his classes, one of whom he felt "inferiority compared to him" and the other as "more approachable to me". Jones described the former as "very Americanized and he's attractive, very conventionally attractive for an Asian guy. He's buff and he's very social and very cool." He described the more "approachable" guy as "nerdier, definitely scrawnier. I think he's more Asian-y than the other guy." Thus, Jones equated being attractive, strong, and cool as a man to being "Americanized," meaning Whiteness, and being skinny and nerdy as Asian qualities, ones he was not intimidated by and saw himself being like. Thus, "dude-bro masculinity" is something that Jones, as an Asian trans*masculine person could not and did not want to attain.

Fraternities did not need to be present to elicit fraternity-related imagery when describing college masculinities. Even though Seth attended a women's institution, he was exposed to cis men at nearby institutions, including one where "the whole college feels like a frat. They kind of resonate with this kind of ultra-masculine businessman-meets-jock image." Being around what Seth referred to as "bros" like the ones at this institution, bubbled up feelings of insecurity around his masculinity. They shared that "I feel like I have to prove something, and it's hard, because I don't know what I'm trying to prove." In addition to insecurity, Gabriel talked about feeling unsafe at a neighboring

campus, associated with his institution, which he described as “the conservative school, very bro-y, very beer pong and bro tanks and unfortunately that also leads to a lot of sexual assault cases and stuff too.” He described using his White masculinity as a shield and how privileged that made him as compared to trans*women.

So walking through there at night with all the parties and stuff I kind of do the like “I’m a White man” privilege, like don’t mess with me kind of thing, but I know for example a lot of trans*women feel very scared going there which is a big problem.

This White masculinity protected Gabriel from the potentially dangerous impact of fraternity-maintained institutional masculinity. When Mohammad talked about the connections between athletics, Greek life, and masculinity on his campus, he described institutional masculinity as unhealthy, heteronormative, and misogynistic. He dismissed the institution’s rhetoric around having “room for diversity” due to the consistent highlighting of sports and fraternities,

So when I think about masculinity at the university, I think it’s like very unhealthy masculinity because also just the way that females are treated, like sexual assault cases are treated at our university, it’s like horrible. I think it gives masculine people, I don’t know, kind of a bad rap because that’s not in my opinion what masculinity is.

Greek Life was also central for Blake in describing their undergraduate institution. Situated in the South, they specifically described the university as a “super preppy and fratty” environment, wherein they developed their masculinity, queerness, and transness “in opposition to that culture of ‘southern gentleman’ kind of deal,” partly in “trying to change that culture and make it more trans* friendly and queer friendly.” In comparison, Blake felt a different kind of challenge at his graduate institution in the Northeast, where the students are

not in opposition to anything with their constructions of self and they just seem apathetic when it comes to making change and stuff... and I think part of why it's different is people up here think they're so enlightened and inclusive and things and don't actually want to acknowledge differences and talk about them. It's just like they would rather hide those things.

Despite Blake previously discussing the construction of their own masculinity as oppositional to the dominant masculinities they observed at their undergraduate institution, they also acknowledged how even their queer- and trans*- connected masculinity provided them with access to institutionally-affirmed and socially-emboldened leadership. They remarked that,

by the time I graduated my undergrad I was basically the leader of the queers, the president of the student group and all of these things. Meeting with administrators, helping start the LGBTQ Resource center and doing this research project and I think that maybe a part of why, I mean I don't know which came first, but my masculinity... if I had been a trans*woman or something I don't think that the administration or that other students would have necessarily been so supportive and wanting me to be their leader in that way. I also think that my masculinity was also a part of me feeling empowered and more comfortable as a human existing in the world which is part of why I was able to be a leader in the ways that I was.

Others also discussed the connection they observed or experienced between masculinity and leadership on their campuses, both at the student and the administrative levels. Jay reflected back to his first time as an undergraduate student and his involvement in campus Black communities.

Even amongst the Black guys it was like this model of how to be a man, you know? Particularly I was in a lot of organizing circles and stuff like that. It was like, the man leader; leading everything even though the women were doing all the work. So we had a lot of leaders who could speak but weren't doing the actual grunt work. That left an impression on me.

Considering how often there are more Black women on campus than Black men, one also has to wonder what the impact is on Black women to dominate numerically, but

not see themselves in positions of power and influence within their communities. In regards to the masculinization of leadership as it related to people with authority on campus, Mohammed described administrators and campus police, as being “patriarchal” and “policing on people.” This has implications for students of color, in particular Black students, who are already policed on and off college campuses, and many may have come from the increasingly policed public school system (Anderson, 2015). Additionally, just as many other institutions in the U.S. currently, Mohammad’s campus was undergoing a federal Title IX investigation. In response to this investigation,

the Dean of Students consistently says, ‘We are a school of excellence, we are a school where men behave themselves.’ This rhetoric of like, oh well it’s not really men who are true [campus name] students who do this, so he tries to push himself away from the sexual assault cases instead of owning up to it (sic). That it happens and it’s like, it’s a very real thing, and a very common thing. So like for me, like that masculinity is very dangerous, or saying that being masculine is like separating yourself away from the rapists and stuff, but not really owning up to the fact that these *are* [campus name] students who are doing this, and it’s not just the students who are on the fringe. It’s the men of [campus name] or whatever, the masculine dudes you actually look up to, the sports players, the Greek life that administration actually literally and directly takes photo ops with and gives money to.

Although many brought up athletics and Greek Life, misogyny and sexism were not limited to hyper masculine spaces on campus. Most of Charles’ observations of misogyny and sexism occurred in the theatre program, where he noticed how men treated women as helpless, or questioned their femininity when they were not helpless.

We have some really kick ass female identified carpenters and they are fucking boss. Better than a lot of the male identified carpenters that we have. But I still see those female identified folks being, not laughed at, but when they show up to an event and they’re just really, really nice, people are like ‘oh my gosh you’re so pretty!’ It’s like what the fuck? Like are you expecting them to be ugly because they can use a saw better than you can?

Coffee Bean experienced a trajectory-altering impact when Whiteness, misogyny, and masculinity colluded at the contextual intersection of their campus and media. Despite their lifelong love of film and their initial motivation to become a filmmaker and “stop with this bullshit racism in Hollywood,” their campus experiences with racism and gendered oppression “just beat all of that idealism out of me... So then it just made me think of like, do I really want to reform a system that was never meant to be equitable?” leading them to abandon their dream and switch to education where they believed they could make a stronger impact.

I grew up with a bunch of Latino teachers so I never felt ashamed to be Latino. But these kids are, because they're growing up in a predominantly White space. And so I think how I'm much more interested in engaging with *that* and reforming *that* than dealing with Hollywood's bullshit.

Eli and Jones talked about the masculinity present in their disciplines and in their particular institutions and programs, and its impact on their experiences and identities.

When comparing dental school to his undergraduate institution for example, Jones said,

We have more privileged people, rich White people... a little before I enrolled... I think it was mostly frat guys, and I don't know. Definitely more traditionally stereotypical heteronormative cisnormative kind of environment than undergrad for sure. Dentistry is still a male-dominated occupation.

This made dental school harder for him to be himself than at his undergraduate institution, where “there was more freedom to be you and be weird and I think there's more space for that and it's understood that college is a time when people find themselves.” Due to the relative smallness of his professional program, Jones believed it would have been easier for him to medically transition as an undergraduate, because

we see each other every single day... If I didn't know these people then I could just be free to be myself but I feel this pressure inside to hold onto the identity I brought into school. So that they don't get freaked out that I'm a totally different

person. I've been on hormones for... it's been 6 weeks. So [my voice is] starting to change and while I like it getting deeper and I can maintain it in a deeper range, I keep going in a higher register with my voice because I don't want to put [my classmates] off guard or surprise them.

Eli, who is transferring from a traditionally women's institution to a coeducational campus "as female," talked about the projected difficulties of doing so within the male-dominated sciences.

It's very hard for women... I am a bit concerned about going to [another institution], I am excited for going to [another institution], but it is a male dominated school. I'm a little concerned about what that is going to look like and what classes are going to be like.

Part of his concern was related to his experiences at his current institution, but specifically with professors who were men, rather than the institution itself, which he described as a supportive space for him as a trans*masculine person.

I don't like taking classes with male professors. I think a lot of it is because of... I don't want to keep using the word patriarchy but it's a patriarchal thing. I feel uncomfortable in their class because they're like, 'oh yeah we're at a women's college and we're empowering women.' But someone comes in that's not in the gender binary or is different; class is a little bit more uncomfortable. It's more like ignorance. Like ignore me and like glance my way but never like ask me for questions, that sort of thing. It's not really a communication, it's a lack of communication. Yeah, like pretends this person is not in the room.

Peter and Eli, who attended the same institution and interviewed together, both described the campus as a generally supportive space for trans*masculine students. Their classroom experiences differed as they talked about individual professors. Unlike Eli, Peter named several professors in the physics department who have made him feel accepted and affirmed. Professors' last names are removed to protect Peter and Eli's confidentiality.

One of my physics teachers, I adore. Dr. A., she's wonderful and she asks for pronouns on the first day. She has a 'question gender' mug and she's perfect.

She really helped me feel accepted. So did basically the entire physics department. Dr. A. asked up front, Dr. D. and Dr. L. took a little bit longer but they did ask me and I was like okay cool! They were very respectful from there on out. I don't think I've ever heard them misgender me.

Peter went on to describe, as Eli often nodded in affirmation, being “a part of a community that is for the most part respectful of all of the range of masculinity that we have,” despite the institution being traditionally for women and experiencing some misgendering. He expected to feel this way about this specific institution and talked about a former student, he knew about.

I know when Kaden was here he was on one of the, oh god, how little I know about sports. He was on a sports team and he was, I think he was allowed to take T [testosterone] and be on that sports team. So that was cool I think. That's part of the reason I came here, because I saw the spectrum of identities and I felt like I would fit in here because it wasn't exclusively women and it wasn't exclusively femme women. There were a lot of butch identities and there were a lot of non-binary and male identities, not a lot but they existed and we're a small college so percentage wise there's still probably a lot.

Seth, who attended a different traditionally women's institution, talked about the centering of femininity as an experience he appreciated. He described his campus as a “feminist institution,” which he was quick to clarify as not a negative aspect, considering he self-identified as a feminist. For him, this just meant that masculinity was,

just not something that it prioritizes. I think because society does place such a high value on masculinity, that being a woman on this college is a point of pride and says, ‘Hey, femininity is like the cultural, subcultural standard in this area, and not masculinity.’ I guess personally, being a trans* man at [this campus], I feel like I'm both intimidated and inspired, because of having all these strong female figures.... It doesn't really take away from my experience of being a trans* man aside from I don't really run into a lot of guys, and ones I can look up to. It enhances my appreciation for strong female figures.

So for students like Seth, Eli, and Peter, the decentering of masculinity as “the cultural... standard” at traditionally women's colleges allowed them to be in

environments where dominant and hegemonic masculinity was not the institutionalized norm. They experienced diverse genders on campus, including masculinities, being affirmed rather than discarded. These institutions counteracted the overvaluing of masculinity and undervaluing of femininity that they saw throughout society, and thus were spaces where they could also exist. Comparatively, Jones did not experience spaces for women at his coeducational institution as an affirming space. He described living on an “all-women floor” in campus housing and feeling “like that was a time for conformity for me and really learning how women are like... I was actively trying to be as girly as possible within the limits I set for myself.”

While Jones contended with the pressures of being feminine enough in the residence halls, Stephen and Gabriel, who interviewed together, shared instances of being ascribed masculinities that did not fit in classes they took as undergraduates. For Gabriel this ascription came from the instructor of the scuba shop where his PE class went for scuba diving, who he described as “a pretty typical scuba instructor guy, like kind of a bro, he’s a big guy and stuff and I was very much dude bro-ed and that happens to me a lot.” Gabriel also shared that instances like that happened especially when he was perceived to be younger than he was and usually by older men, almost as a welcoming ritual to “the good old boys club.”

Stephen on the other hand shared an instance that involved a peer in a ceramics class he took as an art student. Stephen, who at the time had “just started T [and] looked pretty ambiguous” on his roster picture, was read as a guy when he showed up to class by the instructor who said “oh, you’re a guy, I couldn’t tell by your picture.” At this point,

the one other guy in the class was like ‘oh burn’ or something like that and it was so bizarre. Like I should have been offended that my manliness was so ambiguous in the photograph and I should be upset and this is something that I should be jokingly teased for. It all felt sort of very socially scripted in this way that was like, the appropriate response now is for me to be upset that I may not have been read as a man because obviously that’s offensive or something.

In a manner both Stephen and Gabriel were expected to respond to these situations in ways that communicated a particular type of masculinity. In Gabriel’s case, he was supposed to be elated at being seen as one of the guys, whilst Stephen was supposed to be offended for not being immediately recognized as one. Stephen described these expected responses as “a social script that you’re supposed to follow... [and] if you don’t know the script, then there’s that too.”

Non-dominant college masculinities. It was not just some of the study’s participants that did not always follow these social scripts. There were others on their campuses that consciously or unconsciously resisted them. This made college an environment where, like Eli, many participants’ definitions of masculinity “changed a lot.” For example, some participants experienced validations from other non-script following masculine people on campus and found examples of non-dominant masculinities they related to or saw as models. These were often staff and faculty, and participants discussed them as exceptions or alternatives to the embeddedness of dominance in institutional masculinity. For Bastian, this exception was

...a professor at my university who was the first feminist I ever met and he used to participate in [the] Rocky Horror [Picture Show] and he’s completely heterosexual, he’s just a very big, complex personality I guess. So to me I liked that professor so much I thought I’m going to model my masculinity off of him. He writes poetry, I write poetry, that’s still masculine.

Other participants did see models of masculinity they connected with in queer and trans*-identified staff on campus, who in various ways embodied queer masculinities. Daniel referred to two queer staff as mentors “in queer masculinity.” In reference to his own gay identity as someone who predominantly dated other men, there was “Landon (a pseudonym), who like seeing him marry some other man but still sort of owning his masculinity, but doing it in a real gentle way.” Whereas Mike (a pseudonym) “really strongly identifies as queer and masculine, but also is in a hetero-romantic relationship,” has become significant in Daniel’s life now that he finds himself in a relationship with a woman and has the ability to discuss how to negotiate his masculinity in that space with Mike. Thus, for Daniel it was significant to know both Mike and Landon and see the varying ways they embodied gentle, queer masculinities, regardless of the gender makeup of their relationships. Staff in some ways were adopted by trans*masculine students as father figures to learn or re-learn masculinity through queer and trans* lenses, in contrast to cis- and heteronormative ones that their biological fathers held. This was certainly true for RJ and Coffee Bean. For RJ that staff member showed up at his undergraduate institution as an advisor and a supervisor.

He was the first out trans*-anything at the school... It was just from that story, from him being my advisor we’ve built this very beautiful relationship and connection, and mentoring, and chosen family. I can call him up and be like, ‘Yo... I’m not doing so hot right now, let’s talk. Can we check in?’ That’s cool because I still have that connection with him even now with me graduating and being across several states and stuff like that. He’s been really powerful because he acknowledges his White male privilege, but he also acknowledges that when he first started transitioning and how he identifies transitioning, he had to basically have to decolonize his way of performing masculinity but also that entailed working through a lot of transmisogyny, and I’ve learned a lot from him.

Coffee Bean met their trans* father figure, Ryan (a pseudonym), when they visited the institution as a Posse scholar before matriculating. Ryan was the director of the campus LGBTQ resource center at the time, and it was his openness with his trans* identity that captured Coffee Bean's attention.

He was so open about 'yeah, when I transitioned and a couple of years passed, blah, blah, blah,' and I'm just like 'you transitioned?! Que?! The scandalousness, like what do you mean?' And he was just like 'yeah, whatever. I've got my partner.' And I was just like 'oh my god you have a partner? Oh my god. You can have a life and be trans? Like, get the fuck out.' I wasn't actually explicitly saying this, but in my head it was like sort of stewing, you know? And the fact that he talked about, 'I love my job,' I was just like, damn, and you've got a job where you can be like out and you're happy, and your family is cool with it... like, all of these things that I thought were insurmountable. And he's someone who was just chilling, living their life like 'yeah, whatever, fuck it.' I know Ryan now and it's not like he's totally fucking perfect but the fact that those things are accessible, they're real and they can happen to someone like me, wow, you're someone like me, damn! Like it was, and I'm starting to tear up, that was so life changing, it really was.

Meeting and getting to know trans*masculine staff in their full humanity, their struggles and their resilience, even when their gender identities and presentations did not completely align with the students', was an entry point to imagining multiple possibilities of trans*masculinities for RJ and Coffee Bean. Both RJ and Coffee Bean mentioned their trans* father figures' White identities and the significance of that identity being owned and acknowledged by these staff members that allowed them to have relationships of trust with them. RJ further named how that person's awareness of their White and masculine privileges taught them about working on addressing internalized dominance. Going from having a White trans* father figure at their undergraduate institution, RJ adopted a Black cis father figure, who is a staff member at their graduate program.

It's just been great to see him and to get hugs from him and to see that vulnerability from him. To see how fluid he is too in his presentation and

expression of gender... that's been really great. From a POC [person of color] that's been really great.

Meeting other trans* individuals on campus was influential in Seth's understanding of masculinity and trans*ness. This was not limited to masculine-identified trans* people.

My chemistry professor, she is a trans*woman. She tells me that she isn't the most feminine individual. She can kind of be like a tomboy or whatever. It's kind of helped me realize that as a trans* person I don't really have to adhere to anything.

Peers also at times provided some of the affirmation and modeling that participants sought, including alumni like one that Seth met who identified as a trans* guy.

Talking to him, I was expecting someone who was more masculine I guess. But he was very soft. He told me his image for himself was replicating that soft masculinity that his father had, and that he was gentle, but there was still like the feeling of masculinity resonating off of him... it wasn't something that was overplayed, it was there.

Some participants also talked about the role that cisgender peers had in affirming their masculinities and allowing them to feel like themselves around these peers. Jack talked about feeling "most masculine" around cisgender men and "being affirmed in my masculine gender presentation." Whereas most participants related fraternities with hegemonic masculinity and often did not relate to fraternity men, Jack found validation within the fraternity he joined at his institution.

I'm actually involved in a fraternity on campus, a Deaf fraternity... So I go and hang out with them and they're like, 'sup bro,' because you know it's a frat place... and they all know I'm a trans* person and they're so like, 'that's great! We got your back!'

Cisgender peers provided a sense of comfort for Jones, when they themselves acknowledged and pointed out that masculinity did not look one particular way. When he talked about masculinity with some of his friends,

they were like, there's this guy and that guy in our class and they're not super masculine. So they're trying to explain to me that there's different ways of being a dude. So it comforts me to know that there are, just like there are so many types of women, there are different types of men. So that gives me the freedom to be myself and however sensitive I am it's okay.

The validation from cisgender people was particularly significant for trans*masculine students of color when this came from peers of color, especially men of color and specifically Black men. The simplest gesture from these peers had lasting impact, such as was the case with Earl.

I went to a historically Black college so there's a lot of like The Divine Nine, the Black sororities and fraternities on campus and I pretty much wore a bowtie every day. I was in biology class and a guy from Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity... cause if you tie your own bowties they're kind of askew sometimes so it was a little wonky. He basically got in there and played ball, 'hey man let me help you out, your bowtie is crooked' and got in there and fixed it and I thought that was pretty neat. I mean I liked it, because yeah I felt particularly masculine, because another guy was helping me with that, but then also it felt really nice because this is something you don't really see often so I thought that was cool too.

When institutions exhibited a lack of non-dominant masculinities and genders on their campuses, participants utilized institutional resources to supplement their curricular and co-curricular endeavors, and tap into what felt missing for them in terms of self and community. Despite minoring in gender studies as an undergraduate, Blake "learned and studied about queerness and transness... kind of on my own." They discussed a project they undertook and did research for over the summer months,

when I started reading lesbian feminist history and the Lavender Menace and there was a week or two where I was like these women are awesome. I'm going to identify as a lesbian feminist too. And then a couple weeks later I was reading

about queerness and Act Up and all these groups from the 90s and I was like actually identifying as a strong woman figure doesn't fit me and I really like this idea of queerness. So then I started identifying as queer, but that was also the summer when I first heard of what it meant to be genderqueer and I think it was in an LGBT newspaper. That was the summer I first started to get on Tumblr and was following all of these genderqueer blogs and so like watching all of these YouTube videos from trans* guys and non-binary people. So all of that was kind of spurred by this project. I was doing the project, because I was an Honors Fellow so we had to do the project, but I also got this \$15,000 research award to do the project. So I guess it started kind of independent of classes but related to the thesis and then I started bringing it into my classes after that. So any time I could write a paper on a topic of my choice I would make it something related to genderqueerness and things like that.

Jay also talked about utilizing institutional resources, but needing to leave the physical confines of the university in order to be exposed to non-dominant influences of masculinity. He shared that,

I've been blessed to have had the opportunity to travel on the university's dime. That definitely made a big influence to be able to go to different conferences and things like that. So it was actually me getting out of [the campus town] right, through the university that those spaces have made the biggest impact on me.

Specifically, for Jay, "those spaces" referred to the conferences put on by the US Students Association, a national student-led advocacy organization, and the identity-based caucuses within it. This included the poor people of color caucus and the queer coalition, where he "was around other queer and trans* folks of color from around the country and was able to build relationships with people."

Thus, for almost all the students, these examples and stories conveyed exceptions within or even departures from otherwise institutionalized hyper-masculine cultures and environments. Gabriel on the other hand described his institution, part of a consortium of several colleges, each with its own identity and culture, as "the social justice, humanities, hippy school... which is why I chose it." The college had "a lot of people into art, and a

lot of musicians,” allowed for different types of masculinities to coexist and thus “doesn’t reinforce and put pressure on me trying to create a sort of masculinity that isn’t mine... doesn’t necessarily lend itself to forcing me to conform to this party bro culture [at one of the other colleges].”

Demian described their institution as “one of the queerest communities I’ve ever been in,” which has meant feeling validated in their identities as masculine and agender. They explained that “it would have been very easy for me to ignore this side of myself, because it’s just easier to not. But now that I am here, it’s really exciting and I get to understand more about myself in the process.” Demian knew trans* peers all over campus, particularly at the residence hall where they lived, including their roommate, who

was the first person that I know who had done the gender thing and ze uses ze/zim/zir pronouns, like was doing that before we came here and slowly everybody else here, there was like a solid community that preexisted. Then the incoming freshmen like they came here and found out this is something you can do, so like everybody came out over winter break... People here are, the community is really good about pronouns. People just ask all the time just like make sure, my friend who lives across the hall is bigendered and so we ask her pronouns on a daily basis... And it’s a good community.

Beyond students, Demian talked about the role that faculty and staff also played in creating a culture where pronouns were asked rather than assumed. This included “some teachers on the first day of class they say, say your name, your major, and your pronoun. That during orientation on your name tag they have you write your name and your pronoun.” Demian did, however, contrast their experience on campus to what they see transpiring on a Facebook group page for the institution that includes current students and faculty, as well as alumni and former faculty. Hinting at perhaps this cultural shift

being a recent one for the institution and describing it as a “generational thing,” Demian talked about

some threads about gender and stuff and it’s just I don’t know. I’m not really sure what’s going on. Some people are like really mean and then there’s a really solid community of current students who are trying to fight back against it... But then, specific things that they say, I know that it’s not good for me personally to like sit there and read the thread, it’s just not a fun time, so I try not to.

Summary

Even at Demian’s otherwise progressive institution, media – in this case social media – reinforced dominance and hegemonic notions of gender, continuing to make hegemonic masculinity inescapable. The participants in the study described dominant masculinities as the first and most present masculinities in their lives. They often learned about them from their fathers, who were action-oriented, concerned with careers and financial stability, and unable or unwilling to be emotionally vulnerable. At times they found themselves struggling or not wanting to resist dominant narratives of masculine expression and identity. At an institutional level, hegemonic and toxic masculinity was pervasive, often associated with rape culture, Greek Life, athletics, and Whiteness. Many found encouragement and alternatives in exceptional models of positive and non-oppressive masculinities around them, both on and off campus. This included staff, faculty, alumni, and peers, across genders and sexualities. These models meant that dominant masculinity, the threshold where trans*masculine college students began to conceptualize what being masculine means, was not the only option and they could negotiate different pathways for themselves. In the next three chapters, trans*masculine students describe the variety of (trans*)masculine pathways they traverse, often in interlocked connection with race, class, ability status, and sexuality. After an explanation

of what the pathways mean and how they transpire, the chapters dig into each individual pathway and sub-pathway with evidence from the students' reflections.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS ON RACIALIZED (TRANS*)MASCULINITIES

The previous chapter introduced the findings of this study and explored the first part of those findings, namely the threshold of dominant masculinities. This threshold functions as an entry point for trans*masculine college students into deviated possibilities of masculinity pathways. This and the next two chapters present these deviated possibilities, which encompass the rest of the study's findings – the pathways. The pathways represent the various (trans*)masculinities that the study's participants took on to (re)define their gendered identities. These (re)definitions were informed by their intersecting and salient identities and realities. These pathways are understood to exist within – and not independent of – the contexts of dominance, hegemony, genderism, and patriarchy, (as well as racism, classism, and other systems of oppression) as illustrated in Appendix I. The pathways, explained in more detail in the next section, do not remove trans*masculine people or trans*masculinities from these contexts, but rather offer alternative possibilities within them. Some of these pathways may start from a similar point, but diverge, while others get closer to each other, and others find themselves in a similar space at a particular point in time only.

Pathways

The following section presents the first of the (trans*)masculine pathways, namely racialized (trans*)masculinities. The second and third pathways are explored in chapter 6 and 7 respectively. Each of these overarching pathways include further variations or sub-pathways within them that are also discussed in each of their respective chapters. Although the threshold was explored first in the previous chapter, because of its function as a negotiating and conceptual entry point into masculinity, the order in which the pathways are described in this chapter do not suggest an order by which trans*masculine college students explore said pathways. Thus, this presentation should not be read as a trans*masculine developmental model whereby trans*masculine college students start with dominance and arrive at authenticity with a number of ordered steps in between, as many of these pathways emerge and re-emerge at different times and can occur concurrently, rarely if ever being completely resolved. Rather the order demonstrates how individuals' definitions of masculinity/ies become increasingly complex and authentic as they visit pathways. The separate naming of the pathways and sub-pathways ought not to suggest that they are entirely mutually exclusive, as this is not presenting an orderly developmental model. Meaning their separate presentations does not indicate that there is an inauthenticity inherent in reoriented (trans*)masculine embodiments, or that authentic (trans*)masculinities are not informed by race. In fact, the majority if not all the pathways and sub-pathways are variously intersectional. Traversing multiple pathways and sub-pathways simultaneously is analogous to taking multiple classes in a semester, allowing learnings from one to inform approaches in

another, and with subsequent semesters becoming more and more integrated and complex in one's tackling of assignments and learning.

Additionally, the pathways are intentionally named as *(trans*)masculine* rather than as either *trans*masculine* or *masculine*. To remove *trans** entirely from the names of the pathways is to dismiss the role that the students' *trans**ness has played in shaping and informing their gendered conceptions and experiences. However, to tether *trans** and *masculine* together without parenthetical disruption might allow for two suggestions to be made: (a) that these pathways are only possibilities for *trans*masculine* individuals and irrelevant for other masculine people, and (b) that for these students *trans**ness and masculinity are always integrated and fused, and thus they cannot be *trans** and not masculine or vice versa. The implications of this parenthetical disruption is further explored in the next chapter.

As I looked over the terms they used to define their genders, it was clear that even within a small disaggregated portion of the *trans** community, there are many ways to understand gender. Some of the terms students used to describe themselves included transmasculine, non-binary, genderqueer, queer, gender neutral, masculinish, masculine of center, Two Spirit, man of transgender experience, male, transman, FTM, boi, trans, and others. Additionally, eight of the participants utilized singular they/them/their pronouns as either their primary pronouns or among a set of pronouns they use, reminding us that not all *trans*masculine* individuals utilize he/him/his pronouns exclusively or at all. These terms and pronouns serve as signifiers to further challenge the notion that there is an essential *trans*masculinity* that ought to be understood, but

rather than trans*masculine college students are charting multiple masculinities, or pathways.

Racialized (Trans*)Masculinities

Although, race and racism play an underlying role across all the pathways, as well as the threshold in the previous chapter, they also interact with masculinity in a manner that informs how we read and perceive others. This is exemplified by Blake, a White non-binary transmasculine person, who said, “I think I fall into the same pattern of reading Black men as more dangerous than White men. Although I also think I do read White men as dangerous but not as dangerous perhaps.” This quote also reminds us that trans*masculine individuals are not immune to racism-informed socialization, just because they may be aware of and even resist genderism-informed socialization. This section discusses how these students’ masculinities interact with their racialized identities and experiences to inform racialized pathways. First, (trans*)masculinities of color are explored with particular attention given to Black (trans*)masculinities, followed by White (trans*)masculinities.

(Trans*)Masculinities of Color

Participants talked about some of the ways they experienced Whiteness, White supremacy and racism as impediments to their desire to embody or witness representations of masculinities that were both positive and culturally affirming. Specifically, trans*masculine students of color brought up colonialism, respectability politics, and being seen as threats as racialized beings as mediators in their experience of masculinities within and outside of their racial and cultural communities.

Charles brought up the example of how hair played a role for him in his racialized (trans*)masculine pathway, when he stated, “I miss [my long hair] actually most days because in Hawai’ian culture, pre-western influence long hair was a thing. Nobody had short hair, that was weird, why would you have short hair if you were a guy? That was weird.” For Charles, his short hair is a reminder of colonialism’s impact on his culture’s understandings and enactments of gender and gender cues. The impact of colonialism on language surfaced as a barrier for Seth, specifically with helping their parents “have the vocabulary to talk about it... how do you say ‘cisgender’ in Spanish?”

Bastian talked about how “the Two Spirit community is still being influenced by some colonialist ideas regarding gender.” As an example, he talked about how “the ones that were born and assigned male at birth tend to speak over the trans members and the women,” and how he believed Western values have “polluted” Lakota masculinity to mean “that wives should submit.” RJ similarly spoke to the role that colonialism has played in how they experience Latino masculinities, as well as their desire for Latino masculine people to acknowledge and undo the imported toxicity. They shared that,

For me I encounter machismo/maschista as fucked up shit from my culture. It’s like, we’re colonized, and we’ve been colonized and we need to acknowledge that, Latino men and POCs and especially when it comes to that term [machismo/machista] being in the Latino community. That’s a colonizer’s way of engaging masculinity. That’s fucked up and that’s aggressive, not ok. We need to decolonize that... There is a connection there between machista coming from White [people] and me identifying from the Latino community, what I’ve seen from males. Oh, I recognize that because Latino men portray that. And it’s not all Latino men.

Coffee Bean also expressed frustration at Latino men who perpetuated colonized notions of Latino masculinity and misogyny. As a student involved in Greek Life, they often recognized the incorporation of these ideologies in language and symbols of Latino

fraternities. This was an important factor for them in deciding to pledge a Latina sorority instead of a Latino fraternity, “because I know some of the shit that they do, I know... their masculinity is totally built on the subjugation of women, ultimately, or everything that is feminine.” They were particularly taken aback by one fraternity giving themselves the nickname *conquistadores*, or conquerors, “as though that’s something to be proud of, as though we’re not part of the legacy of colonialism.” They later described that organization’s hand sign, whereby a fist made by one hand – representing women – is held back or protected by the palm of the other hand – representing men – and how to them the hand sign thus paternalistically symbolized how the fraternity is “all built on how can we protect the women.”

Mohammad’s involvement in pro-Palestinian activism and the interaction between his Palestinian and masculine identities heightened his positionality at the intersection of racism, Islamophobia, and masculinity.

My Palestinian [identity] and masculinity intertwined is very interesting in terms of like opposition. I see that it’s actually really weird. The Zionist group on campus, they’re very much into LGBTQ rights. But then also they’re like quick to label me more as a terrorist. This happened during a divestment [hearing], where I was like accused of carving a swastika into a dorm room, which they never provided evidence of, any pictures or anything. Also I was called a terrorist during the actual hearing. I think that because of my masculinity it’s more, it’s easier to call me that, a terrorist, than it is for the female Palestinians. Where they’re just like, they say that [female Palestinians are] oppressed or they support terrorism, rather than being terrorists.

The reality that many individuals and institutions fuse masculinity and being a person of color to mean dangerous person was not lost on Charles. He talked about making certain clothing choices so as not to be seen as a threat or experience racial profiling by police. Even as a non-Black person of color (NBPOC), realizing he is not

directly harmed by anti-black racism, Charles is still skeptical of authoritative institutions like the police as his distance from Whiteness leaves him unprotected from it.

Subconsciously, I don't ever walk around with the hood of my jacket up. I've been thinking about that lately because I have an all-black jacket. I'm a theater person of course I have all black everything... I acknowledge I'm not a Black man, I do not have any semblance of understanding of that at all and I don't pretend to. But I do acknowledge being a person of color, potentially some people say that I look Latino and... If I'm perceived to be a Latino male walking around at 12 o'clock in the morning with my hood up and a big backpack and looking whatever bulky, I can't say that a police officer isn't going to stop me from walking and be like where are you going. It hasn't happened but I can't say with certainty that it won't. I don't have the Whiteness I suppose on my side.

As part of the entanglement of Whiteness and masculinity, participants also talked about the complications of cisnormativity, itself a product of colonialism as described earlier, in gendered racialized spaces. When reflecting on how their Latino and trans* identities are interconnected, Coffee Bean remarked on the pressures "to rip the two of them apart because one is a little more acceptable at the moment than the other." While naming the resistance to their trans*ness that they experience in their sorority, Coffee Bean simultaneously brought up the organization's history and values, specifically its race-centered activist roots, as a reason they joined in the first place. This was connected to their own personal history and values, the significance of their socialization as a woman of color and anti-misogynistic ideals.

There's also a part of me that's not interested in denying the fact that I was socialized as a woman of color or that I at some point said yeah I'm a girl, you know what I mean? I don't identify that as like now necessarily, but I feel like it's almost misogynistic in its own way... to deny the fact that at some point in my life, I was a girl... That's real and that shapes me and that's who I was and that will always be a little part of who I am and I think that also informed some of my reason for joining [my sorority].

Their struggle to “disentangle Whiteness from trans*ness” and the importance of cultural history also informed their decision to not adopt a new masculine first name, but rather to be addressed by their last name alone. As I write this, I am also reflecting on Coffee Bean’s choice of a pseudonym and remembering the enthusiasm with which they picked it, wondering how consciously or subconsciously, this choice was tied to what they shared about their name.

My first name is history, it’s legacy, I was named after my grandma. I don’t want to lose that... because it feels like the whole notion of obliterating my first name to what, pick up and call myself, what, Ethan? John? I could call myself Juan, sure, but I don’t give a fuck, like, that’s not what I am, that’s not who I’m interested in.

Involvement and leadership in culturally-specific activism and spaces was significant for other participants as well in a number of ways. Unlike Coffee Bean’s experience in their sorority, these engagements allowed for some to find acceptance among their cis peers and for others to find their reflections. Mohammad, for example, attributed his Palestinian and Muslim activism as one of the reasons his community was able to accept his trans* identity.

I’m like very much involved in combating Islamophobia. I’m very involved in the Palestine activism issue. I’m one of the most active Arabs. They [community peers] know that like when something about Arabs or Muslims comes up in [town], I’m the first person they call... I think that has a lot to do with why they respect me too... I think that I’m also changing stereotypes for them. Because I am so deeply passionate in change and human rights, and Palestine that they’re like, ‘Oh well not all LGBTQ people are on floats throwing glitter. They actually care about stuff. They’re humans too.’

In addition to community-based activism, participants also found solace, identification, and affirmation when engaging with people of color that lived out diverse presentations and expressions of gender or when they thought about different messages

they received about masculinity from their own communities. Charles, who participated in the Brown Boi Project's (BBP) Leadership Retreat, talked about the impact of that space. At the time of his participation, Charles had not yet begun identifying as trans* and credits being "in a room full of people who identified" like him for his own self-awareness.

We all identified as masculine of center. We were all people of color. I think seeing the spectrum in which you can be within that which is so vast, it was really like, oh my god I think this person that I'm seeing in front of me is like a physical manifestation of all of the feelings that I have and I just didn't know it was possible. So it was such a powerful thing.

Having a vehicle through which to reconnect to his own indigenous roots through BBP was key in Kyle's journey, a participant in a different BBP cohort. When describing the retreat he went on and the shift in his perspective that it triggered, he talked about,

connecting back to indigenous roots and the different tribes that existed that actually understood that masculinity and femininity are fluid, [that] they flow into each other rather than just being binary or either side of the spectrum... I think that if it wasn't for Brown Bois I would probably still have that anxiety, that pressure, to be rigid, to be cold, to try to be hard and all that other stuff. I guess getting connected back to the ancestry that says this never existed before colonialization. This wasn't a part of our culture. We don't even understand what that means... is what kind of transformed my view of what masculinity means to me and what it can mean in another context.

Bastian also harkened back to historical and pre-colonial understandings of gender present in indigenous communities in North America, ones that honored non-binary genders. Unlike RJ and Coffee Bean, who desired but did not seem to witness decolonized examples of Latino masculinity, Bastian believed that he was witnessing some change in Lakota community, albeit slowly, and in some ways in tandem with shifts in the trans* population.

I also think that as the trans* community is beginning to accept more of a fluidity of gender and the general community is starting to accept that, that the Two Spirit community is going through a similar change. But I feel like [the Two Spirit community] might have gotten there just a little bit before the other communities did. That gender is a little more understood as being fluid I guess a little earlier. I like how seamlessly a lot of the members are able to switch from gender to gender.

Having deep historical roots to begin with, it is perhaps unsurprising that Bastian is experiencing Two Spirit communities as more embracing of fluidity in gender than the broader trans* community. RJ also spoke to the power of historicity, being in touch with one's ancestors, and being in community with Black trans* women. For them this was an individual decolonizing practice, resisting the ways they believed their identity/ies had been distorted by centuries of colonialism that they spoke about previously. They stated,

...there's beauty in loving and affirming Black trans*women particularly in their fierceness and their ability to survive every fucking day especially in the South, in the Bible Belt. I just admire that fierceness and try to live out my own fierceness. But pulling from that and ancestors, and my own ancestors with like Taíno and Arawak folk and Puerto Rican-ness. It's a beautiful process of decolonizing. It's been a hard fucking process. The beauty that knowledge is power, but knowledge that comes from your own self is like radical as fuck. It's survival, it really is survival.

Jones also alluded to both the richness and power, as well as the hardship that exists at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities. He talked about how his gender (transmasculine) and race (Korean-American) "have been the two biggest factors" in shaping him.

So I talked to my therapist a lot and she was like, it seems like growing up in [Southern home state] as one of two Asian kids at school you had nobody to mirror you. I had nobody else to look at and oh yeah I'm part of that group. So it's definitely enriched my life culturally in terms of my world view. I'm more understanding of minority status due to my intersecting minority identities. Yet it has also made my life very difficult. I think I had more heartbreak than a normal kid would if they grew up White and straight and stuff in [Southern home state]. I had more stuff to deal with growing up.

While Jones focused on how his Korean-American and transmasculine identities made him “more understanding of minority status,” Mohammad talked about how his own particular intersectional reality imbued a sense of responsibility towards his community tied to his privileged identities. During the interview, he pointed to a painting on his wall to describe his masculinity visually.

So it's an *amo*, Arab uncle dude. So my masculinity is this image of this guy carrying the Jerusalem, but for me it's like carrying the weight of everything. Because I don't know, I also like to carry things, and in a way it kind of makes me feel masculine. Being able to help out and carry the weight off people. Carry problems off people. I would describe my masculinity as giving to others. It's what makes me the most happiest in life, is when I'm able to give to others. Not necessarily synonymous with masculinity, but for me it is. For my personal self. It's having the ability, having the privilege to help others. Using my privilege and accessibility to do so.

Mohammad's sense of his masculine privilege and the responsibility he took on because of it was tied to his upbringing within an Arab community. This upbringing also allowed him to resist notions of individualism and ownership – both of consumer products and women – which he had learned to attribute to U.S. masculinity. In describing his upbringing, Mohammad shared that,

growing up in an Arab community, Palestinian community, for me masculinity is being the protector of your family, of your house, of your land, right? Also masculinity also means just being there for your family. My dad he kind of raises me and my brothers like realizing that like it's a manly thing, you know? To be a good father, a good husband, a good person and not just thinking about yourself for yourself, but thinking about others... [I]n America, masculinity for a lot of young men like my seventh grade students – I talk to them about this all the time – masculinity to them is them thinking about having nice cars and all these women and doing things for themselves. Which is like something that I was taught masculinity isn't, by my father. It's doing things for your family, and others, and your people also.

Jones also held that there were contradicting messages he got about masculinity between “Asian culture” and “American people.” Similar to Mohammad, Jones also used the term American to mean White.

I feel like inherent in Asian culture is kind of this humility and respect thing. So it’s hard to be the aggressive masculine that I see a lot in American people. So no matter how much I try to be, not that I would try to be, but like I don’t think I have it in me to be American masculine.

Jones and Mohammad both described how their upbringings within specific cultural contexts gave them the internal and community-supported resources to resist hegemonic masculinity, attributes of which – such as aggressiveness and individuality – they assigned to White U.S. masculinity. This counter-narrative stands in opposition to racist attributions of danger, threat, and violence to masculine people of color. These were articulated earlier by Charles and Mohammad in particular, and in the next section on Black (trans*)masculinities.

Black (trans*)masculinities. Racialized (trans*)masculinities, as expressed by many of the trans*masculine students of color in the study, are paved and shaped by imperialism, colonialism, racism, and genderism, as well as resistance to those forces. Connection to race-alike communities, particularly gender diverse ones, fortified their ability and willingness to resist. For many of the Black-identified participants in the study, their experiences and masculinities were often additionally shaped by anti-Blackness, both in and outside of queer and trans* spaces. The ways Black-identified participants in the study discussed anti-Blackness and the significance of specifically Black spaces and history on their lives and gender conceptions necessitates examining their stories in a distinctive manner.

Although, Jay, Earl, and Kyle had previous experiences of anti-Blackness, those around them now perceived and treated them as dangerous Black men, suspicious and threatening, and the three of them talked about how they chose to navigate these newly emerging pathways. Jay talked about how relationships with White queer individuals he had previously been in community with began to strain when he physically transitioned. This was in contrast to his relationships with queer people of color, particularly other Black people, when he stated “We’re able to sustain our relationships and roll in our relationships.” Initially, his transition was met with enthusiasm by White queer people, at times beyond what he felt as affirming.

I was [an undergraduate] student at the time and people were like ‘Oh my god, that’s so great, woohooo’... everybody wants the goods... I chose to physically transition for a reason and I feel like people, particularly the White folks, especially the White folks, were really kind of exploiting that to make them feel a little validated. ‘Oh, you’re transitioning, trans, trans, trans, trans, trans, trans, trans,’ you know what I mean? It was really interesting as I transitioned, as the changes started happening physically you know, going into spaces with White queer people and them being like, ‘Who the fuck are you and why are you here Black man?’

Thus Jay had a dichotomous response to his trans*ness (enthusiastic and exploitative) and to his manhood (exclusion and suspicion), as if the two were completely separate and not held by the same person. When Kyle found himself in queer spaces, such as LGBTQ student groups on campus, he talked about feeling “ostracized,” due to discrimination he experienced in those spaces and the erasure he felt of his Blackness. “I would talk about my queer experience and my trans* experience.... and other people would talk about their queer experience and their trans* experience, but then feeling like, ‘Mine doesn’t look the same as yours, cause I’m also Black.’ Jay on the other hand felt his masculinity was stripped of its queerness and trans*ness by others’ interpretations of

Black masculinity as inherently heterosexual and cisgender. He believed others assumed him to be cis het, thus experiencing the ways that queerness is often underwritten by Whiteness. This was different from his experiences with racism and misogyny, which he often connected to his previously gender non-conforming presentation.

Being Black and being a queer woman who is gender non-conforming, I kind of got used to getting knocked around with that and what came with that. Particularly being assertive and talking up and people being like, ‘Oh you’re just the angry Black woman’ type shit.

As he transitioned, Jay pulled back in order to observe how he was being perceived and tracked the microaggressions he experienced and felt disoriented, remarking how he did not know where he stood. “I’m automatically an aggressor, I’m automatically someone causing a problem, I’m automatically a troublemaker, I’m automatically a suspect.” This was true for him within and outside of queer spaces.

I get situations of like people barely touch me, like walking down the street barely, literally I didn’t even really feel it and they’re like, ‘Oh my god I’m so sorry. Oh my god I’m so sorry,’ and like freak out like I’m about to kick their ass or something.

Similar to Jay’s tracking of how others’ perceptions of him shifted, Earl expressed “how some interactions before like starting hormones and after,” including with law enforcement, have been different, making him feel scared about “navigating through the world as a young Black man.” Thinking specifically about when it gets darker outside,

I definitely sense the tension of people that I’m walking towards or walking by. So I find myself being more conscious or aware of distance. I try to keep a distance between myself and the person that I’m walking past or in elevators. More specifically when it’s night time, I’m definitely picking up that increased tension and discomfort.

These experiences of being read as dangerous and untouchable as Black men influenced how Jay and Earl presented their masculinities in predominantly White spaces,

particularly new ones, where concerns for safety and lack of support surface. Jay noted that,

I think that has made me, I don't know I want to say a little hard but I don't know. I think it might, it comes out with my masculinity how I present and all that kind of stuff too. When I come into a situation I kind of have this, my own little place I start at. If I get comfortable then you'll get to really see who I am. When I'm in that space people often perceive me as a cis dude who's straight, you know? I'm not saying that's not a part of who I am, but I just kind of start there when I come into new spaces because from what I've experienced is... especially around White folks. You don't know, you can't trust the situation is what I'm saying, you know what I mean? So that makes me seem probably a little harder than I really am. But it's just like I'm trying to get a feel before I kick it with you, know what I'm saying?

Similarly, the reality of these shifting interactions have led Earl to make some decisions about how to perform his Black masculinity, including in the classroom.

I find in predominantly White environments that I try not to be the angry Black guy. That crosses my mind a lot which is something I don't normally care about but it's just like being in that environment with no backup or support I'm just kind of like, you know, trying to not come across as whatever that means... I don't really take up a lot of space in class for starters. I feel like I don't really say exactly what it is that I'm thinking. Just kind of let a lot of things go unsaid... It's pretty exhausting.

Earl was articulating how the classroom context in particular was forcing him to think about tropes and stereotypes about Black masculinity in ways that made him hyperconscious and analytical of himself and how he showed up. The feeling of exhaustion was palpable as he described the ways he silenced and shrank himself to not “take up a lot of space.” He went on to talk about how these practices made it,

...really hard to show up to class. It got to the point to where I did my work, I turned in my assignments, but going to that class was a chore. Just kind of like hearing people talk about these different situations or experiences they have had that were like ‘eye opening’ and I was like if I hear one more person say eye opening I'm going to jump out the fucking window. It was majority White women. Was me, two other dudes, one other dude was White, but to hear the

White women talk about how they understood discrimination because they were fat or whatever [shakes his head].

Despite that, and while Jay and Kyle were frustrated with others' perception of them as cishet, Earl also utilized that perception to portray a Black manhood that he wanted others to see, and put himself in a position to be heard. At his current institution, Earl has chosen to be stealth, meaning to not disclose his trans* status, so that he can trouble what it means to be a Black (perceived cishet) man to others. This was important to him particularly as a mechanism to be taken seriously when attending to issues around social justice, such as sexism and heterosexism. He had the impression that others believed Black men not to care or talk about these issues.

I felt like I could do more by being Earl the very eccentric Black guy so when we were talking about things in class and if somebody said something offensive or maybe somebody just didn't say something I could raise my hand and be like, that what you said was hurtful and inappropriate because ... or like it's really important to think about sexuality and gender identity, right? So to be that person in the room raising my hand to say that rather than 'oh yeah of course Earl's saying that, he's queer, he's trans*, or whatever, of course he's going to say that.' So just kind of being that eccentric Black dude that's going to say shit that maybe you haven't heard other Black men say. Which I thought was really important.

Cultural notions of what it means to be a Black man went beyond interpersonal interactions. Societal pressures and expectations around Black manhood and masculinity seeped in even as interpersonal relationships did not place Kyle in a position to have to meet them. When he talked about how a former partner affirmed his identity, Kyle shared he felt,

Usually a lot of joy. Somewhat a little bit of pressure, to be honest. Happy that I was being seen as myself, but also a pressure to kind of fit into what it means to be a man. Especially what it means to be a Black man... so I cannot smile? [laughs] Can I be emotional? Can I let loose? And I don't think she created a space where I couldn't. I think because she created a space where there was a lot of freedom within my manhood, I didn't know how to respond to it, because

that's not the typical images that I had seen prior to being in that relationship. I was happy because I was able to be my own type of man, but I also felt a little bit of pressure to always be thinking, 'Am I being the right type of man that she needs?'

Thus even as Kyle's partner afforded him the space to show up how he wanted to, this message conflicted with the messages he was receiving about what Black manhood looks like. One source of these messages about Blackness that made Kyle feel "more boxed in" was his sociology class. His class presented Black people as,

the most masculine [race]... and I was like, what?! That was very much in mind during my transition... I was thinking, 'Am I going to be more aggressive? What does that look like? That's not me, I don't even know...' In watching a film in one of my classes about race, poverty, youth, and the criminal justice system, we watched a film [about] how Black masculinity in general was supposed to be sexist, misogynistic, homophobic, and all that other jazz... I was like kind of scared of that cause I was like, 'I am none of those things, I can't do those kinds of things, I don't think I even have it in me to do any of those things...' So what did that mean? Am I not masculine enough? Am I going to be misgendered because of it? Are people not going to see me as a guy because I'm not this type of thing? What is the Black community going to think about my masculinity? That came up a lot in the sense that at some points I even distanced myself from Black people.

Where Kyle felt restricted by rigid expectations of Black manhood, James, who had previously shared about his gravitation towards "traditional" gender roles, "resonate[d] more with Black culture," partially because of those expectations. James' mother, who is Black, was "usually the enforcer of the rules so I was raised in a Black house versus a White household in the sense of stricter rules, more accountability." James internalized anti-Black racist notions that "culturally, grasping your sense of femininity or masculinity is more important in Black culture than it is in White culture," including from the positionality of a multiracial Black-identified person who one might not identify as Black. On the demographic form that James submitted expressing his

interest to participate in the study, he put down “white, black, native american, asian.” Without that as prior knowledge, as the person interviewing him, I have to admit that I would have likely racialized him as Asian and potentially multiracial, but unlikely as Black. Thus, others might interact with James as an Asian person or a multiracial person or someone else entirely and not necessarily as a Black person.

James commented that “historically Black men have had to fight for their sense of masculinity, their sense of being human even, so it’s a strong tie/relationship to one’s self,” which he connected to his mother’s influence in “how I see masculinity in the sense of how Black people are tied to their culture in comparison to White people.” Compared to his White friends, his mother

was way more strict (sic) and the pressure to be a certain type of kid/role model where my White friends did whatever and didn’t care how it looked... How people perceived you, true or not, was a big deal in my house. You had a reputation and a duty to make the family look good. I took that and ran with it in a masculine way instead of a strong woman way which was my mom’s intention.

James named the carefree and non-strict environments in which his White friends grew up as a privilege, they did not have to think or care about how they were perceived, whereas he had a responsibility to represent his family well. He also compared how he gravitated more towards his fraternity brother’s father’s masculinity than his own father’s. When talking about how he identifies more with his “of color side” than his “White side,” James said,

Maybe part of it is that my brother’s Black, so his family’s Black so when I’m around him and the men he looks up to, so the men I’m going to look up to, like his dad and stuff, who I’m also super close with. It is of Black masculinity versus my dad’s form of masculinity. Honestly, I think, I was raised to be very aware of what White privilege is and the fact that I have it sometimes and sometime I don’t and I think it makes me more aware that I’m a mixed person in the sense that my dad doesn’t get that he has privilege... So I think I just naturally want to gravitate

more to Black masculinity because it is stronger, it is more thought about in the sense that it's more important in the Black culture than it is in the White culture. It has been more fucked with basically. So it's more of a proven thing I suppose.

Thus James' complicated and intentional adoption of a "strong" Black masculinity harkened back to history, community, and culture, something that other trans*masculine students of color, including Black trans*masculine students, also did in search of affirming and resonating – to them – masculinities. Earl felt

really connected historically to the era of the Harlem Renaissance where you have this new Negro or young Black folks and especially young Black men that were doing their intellectual thing. Kind of navigating through the world and interacting with everybody in their community as if they too were a genius, everybody is important, everybody is special, and has something to contribute.

For Kyle, it was one of his mentors, a community-based activist who "was the first Black trans* man that I ever met," that introduced him to the idea of the Black intellectual.

He really helped me with that, and he's continuously helped me, continuously mentored me... tells me just to believe in the fact that I am a Black man, and that doesn't mean that I will not succeed, or that I am not anything, but I have potential, and I can be an intellectual and I can make change happen.

As he struggled to find space for his Blackness to exist in queer spaces and his queerness and fluid masculinity to exist in Black spaces, Kyle found "solace [in] other Black guys who are kind of like me and creating our own kind of pocket community that is very much Black pride... but also has this inclusive kind of masculinity." Where he found he lacked choice in being seen as Black ("there's nothing I can do about it, not saying there is anything I want to do about it"), having choice when it came to

my spirituality grounds me in my ability to be a Black man of transgender experience; it complements everything that I am, [and] makes me able to be more fluid with it, because my spirituality is about acknowledging... the truth of who you are regardless of whatever identities you have.

Where society, his classes, and student organizations sent him confining and limiting messages about the ability of his identities to coexist in his Black trans* body, indigenous spirituality and a community of “Black guys... like me” acted as counter narratives and resistance fuel. It was significant that these came from within his own racial communities to act as healing agents, to “feel connected to the universe by the ability to kind of move like that and do what I need to do in my masculinity.”

Finding someone like him also played a big role for James in crafting his masculinity. When he was pledging his poetry fraternity as a first-year student, the president of the organization was his inductions master. Sam (a pseudonym) complemented his shoes during an informational meeting, which was the opening to Sam and James becoming close, and Sam becoming someone that James looked up to and sought to emulate.

So then I was on line pledging for the frat, people would tell me yeah you're a mini Sam you guys are going to be super close. It was weird because at that time I was like, not a member yet, still on line. Kind of like the bottom of the barrel type person and he was president. So I was like, 'Yo that's super cool that you see that in me.' So I think I naturally gravitated towards that.

Being compared to and wanting then to emulate the president of the organization, and building a close relationship with him allowed James to feel at ease about his gender and trans*ness around Sam. This relationship also gave Sam the opportunity to embrace and affirm James' gender, which James shared about.

I don't have a stand-to-pee device, but I asked him how to use a urinal just out of curiosity. So we're that close. I was like, 'I literally don't get it.' I wear briefs, I see the hole there, but I don't get how they work. He had to explain the whole process to me. He's a really cool guy and he's never had an issue with it. When I told him [that I'm trans*] he was like, I've been calling you brother since I met you, which is true. He was immediately like 'you're like a little brother to me, for some reason you don't feel like a little sister.' At the time I was identifying as a

lesbian, but I was like yeah, yeah, yeah, that fits actually. That makes the most sense. So when I told him that I wanted male pronouns he was like, at this point that's only natural and he never slips up or anything. Even his parents use male pronouns; it's super cool.

James' trust in Sam, a cis het Black man, to ask him intimate questions and open himself up to Sam as being trans male, added more pull for James towards Black masculinity. It is where he found affirmation as personified by Sam, and likely heightened through their membership and sense of brotherhood within a fraternity. The significance of Black masculinity and masculine people came up for non-Black participants of color as well. RJ struggled with their transition to the South, where they experienced the gender binary in a more constricting and threatening way than in their hometown, where they had a community of support. This had led them to embody a more hegemonic masculinity for the sake of survival and safety. It was not until they began to connect with other people of color, and particularly Black men in their program, that they told themselves,

'Hey, wait a minute, I don't need to up my game, because they see me.' Which was like shocking, I was not expecting that. That has always been a struggle for me when a particular community, Black men, is not seeing me as I see myself... and so I was taken aback. Especially being in a geographical location like the south... my perception of them at first I think was like, 'Oh, they are going to be like super conservative and Black-churchy,' which is great, I mean I love the Black church. But it's like, it's going to be that way, conservative thing playing into like our relationships not being able to understand, talk to me, who I am... I feel like once I kind of let go of that, and through just conversations, hellos and goodbyes, lunches, hanging out and having some of them in my classes too, I've come to really admire and respect them. They've also come to admire and respect me. They'll disrupt for me too. They catch themselves too when they're fucking up my pronouns, they will catch themselves in midsentence or right after I just give them a look, and they're like, 'Oh wait,' and they'll correct themselves, which is really nice cause I see the effort that they're putting into it. That's just raw. But yeah, I feel like that caused the shift of being able to claim my own masculinity.

Thus both James' and RJ's friendships and interactions with cis het Black men on campus demonstrate the influence that cis het Black men have in trans*masculine students of color's lives and self-perceptions. These stories resist the ways that cis het Black men are limited to embodying a hyper-masculine, patriarchal, heterosexist, and cissexist manhood. Furthermore, there was deference towards Black people and their experiences specifically with anti-Blackness from NBPOC. For Mohammad as a White-passing NBPOC, there was an acknowledgment that anti-Blackness has a particularly oppressive and limiting impact on the Black people's lives that NBPOC are shielded from, despite also having a shared experience of racism.

As an American White-passing Arab, I have kind of like more freedom I guess to be my authentic self. Whereas... Black trans* guys and Black trans*women don't. Black trans* guys are seen as like Black masculinity which is [seen as] inherently bad, you know? We see that with like police brutality. And Black trans*women, they're seen as like sex workers or like inherently bad by White supremacist American society. So as a White-passing trans* person I can say that I have the privilege in America to be more authentic... I can walk confidently as not only a White-passing person, but as a masculine person by a cop and not really worry about being (a) catcalled, or (b) disrespected or harassed.

White (Trans*)Masculinities

Although race was a fairly consistent part of the interviews with most trans*masculine students of color, it did not come up as particularly salient for most of the White trans*masculine students that participated in the study, with many not even mentioning race at all, either on a personal level or conceptually. Understandings of social justice, privilege, and oppression often centered around their trans* identities. For some, their experiences of marginality as trans* people acted as an entry point into reflecting on their privileged identities, including race, but this was not the case for all

White trans*masculine students. When reflecting on their understanding of social justice, Demian said,

I think that it has really helped me understand because yeah when you don't ever have to deal with [oppression], like I didn't understand for a long time. Until I realized this thing was true about me. Like I suddenly realized all the issues that I was going to face and that trans* people have been facing for a long, long time. Then suddenly I was like, oh! Also I think the second biggest thing that helped me understand a lot of social justice issues was the Ferguson everything. So the first time I was involved with current events and they really affected me.

Thus, although Demian had a better understanding of social justice and oppression due to their trans* identity and experiences, that understanding was still primarily in relation to trans*ness. Even when referencing Ferguson, race in general and their own White identity do not emerge. The manner in which they expressed current events had affected them was in making it “harder to talk to my parents because they just don't get it” and getting “into arguments with them because now I'm very opinionated about things.”

Bastian, who identified as Two Spirit and a Lakota Jew, similarly did not specifically name race or Whiteness, reverting instead to exploring how his Jewish and Irish ethnic identities – both identities that are racialized as White in a U.S. context – informed his understanding of masculinity in contrasting ways.

In Judaism men are allowed to be more feminine, sounds bad saying that almost. I feel like they're allowed [to] be more intellectual and less reliant on stereotypes of strength. In Judaism strength could be almost equated with book learningness. Whereas I feel like Celtic tradition it's a lot more about how much you can drink. Or at least on my Irish side of the family that's what it seems like it is. From what I hear, I have a close friend who still has family in Ireland and even when their uncle who's a priest was visiting, it was still about how much you could drink. To kind of prove your machoness.

The lack of saliency of race and lack of awareness of privilege for White trans*masculine people was a point of frustration for trans*masculine students of color when interacting with their White trans* peers. Coffee Bean articulated how Whiteness within the queer and trans* student population at their institution often emerged as a,

queerer than thou, trans*er than thou shit... where they're inevitably creating this hierarchy, where they're putting themselves at the tippy top and everyone else just sort of has to catch up to them. And they just don't realize that 'bro, you're fucking White, do you understand how unbelievably important that is?' So that is what I struggle with deeply. I struggle with White trans* men and actually White trans* people in general. Just like, using their trans*ness to absolve them of their White privilege, I think.

The four participants who spoke to being White, having White privilege, and seeking to understand the role of Whiteness in their lives were Daniel, Blake, Stephen, and Eli. Daniel described a “sort of trajectory of people in social justice that have dominant identities.” The way he saw this trajectory play out was,

you didn't think about those things and now you're thinking about them, and then there's sort of the phase of 'I have to bring it up any time I'm in space with anyone else – “As a White man this is what I think and because I'm White I feel this type of way and you should know that I know that I'm White and male” ... right? Then you sort of graduate from that into allowing the knowledge of your Whiteness and maleness to enter your actions and like you know you're White and male or whatever. You know that you're being perceived as masculine and all of these things so you can actually allow that knowledge to shape the way you live in the world.

Daniel's trajectory thus moves someone from being unaware of their Whiteness, to then being hyper-aware of it and needing to make sure others know about their awareness. In this way, although the intention might be to participate in anti-racist discourse and space, the manner of that participation continues to center Whiteness and White people. It is when the awareness moves to being an internal guide more so than externalized rhetoric that a White person is able to practice anti-racism, according to Daniel. Even at this

point, however, Daniel found himself needing to continue reflecting internally, such as when he expressed some anxieties about being a White man in social justice spaces on his campus.

Do I really deserve to be here? Should I be here? [This question of deserving to be here] enters [my mind] a lot and it enters it in terms of the power and the privilege and again entering women and gender studies space and entering cultural studies space and being the White guy in the room.

When given the chance to read the transcripts from the interview, Daniel reflected further on whether his words might come across as tokenizing, continuing to challenge himself to notice how Whiteness might show up subconsciously and to keep thinking about race. Blake expressed this desire to go from theorizing race in the abstract to thinking about their own, particularly in relation to their masculinity. As a graduate student in a social justice focused program, this involved thinking about their race and privilege in the context of their career, and noticing the presence of others like them in their desired professional realms.

I want to do queer and trans* work. I really want to work in an LGBTQ resource center or something like that. I think I see a lot of people like me doing that, like White trans*masculine folks. So I think that is definitely... I feel like that career field is open to me. I feel like if I were not White or if I were a trans*woman or trans*feminine I would not see myself reflected in those roles in the same way.

Considering how many of the trans*masculine students of color in the study expressed feeling ostracized and experiencing racism in queer and trans* spaces, Blake's commitment to being aware of their privilege in that arena is significant. For Eli, this awareness came from participating in a local trans* support and activism group. The group was diverse in a number of ways and "wasn't just a safe space," meaning it also

fostered advocacy. Eli talked about the impact that the diversity of the group had on him and his own masculinity.

A lot of it was due to the fact that I've led a fairly privileged life, and a lot of the people in the room were not privileged. There was a lot of discussion about the intersection of different oppressions, and I learned a lot from listening and learning about how lack of privileges in other aspects like class and race impact trans*ness and understandings of masculinity and femininity.

Attending an institution in an urban environment gave Eli access to a diverse trans* space, which created the context to have “intense discussions” and learn how to dialogue across differences. This was not the case for Blake, whose institution was in a predominantly White area in the Northeast.

When I think about masculinity in [the town near campus where I live], there's a lot of trans*masculine people and there's also a lot of hipster guys who like care about their fashion and have well-groomed beards and things like that and they are all White, so... I guess that's the type of masculinity that I'm surrounded by right now. I think I definitely fit the type of skinny, White trans*masculine queer person who spends a lot of time on their, or thinks a lot about their clothing and like has enough money to do that... I think I feel comfortable embodying this kind of masculinity [here].

Stephen and Daniel both talked about what it means to have a plethora of White (trans*)masculine images and people around them, as well as online. Stephen talked about masculinity in general when he said,

I'm White so I honestly think that I've been presented with images of masculinity, of what my masculinity could look like... I mean White men are in everything so your ideas about what it means to be, for the most part I think that masculine standards are based on what traditional White men, [say] masculinity is.

Daniel focused even more specifically on trans*masculine images, and reflected on the moment he realized how incredibly saturated with Whiteness those images had been for him online.

When you transition and you're looking for resources particularly with the YouTube community... you're looking for people who look like you. With that being hyper focused on White trans* guys and seeing sort of [what] their transition looks like, I realized that I didn't really know what trans* men of color looked like until entering space with them but that's been the past couple of years as opposed to the five years of my life where I'm like let me spend six hours on YouTube and it was all White trans* men.

Daniel saw the wide visibility of White trans*masculine images as a privilege he had without even necessarily being aware of it right away. Blake articulated a different privilege as they reflected on their – at the time – beginning hormone replacement therapy. Even as they lamented losing some of the androgyny they expressed at the time, they were aware of the protection shield that Whiteness created for them at the same time.

[I'm] struggling to recognize that people are soon going to be reading me and in more threatening ways as a man but it will be as a White man and not as a Black man so the privileges inherent within that... I think that I have a lot of privilege in being a White masculine person. I'm less likely to be perceived as dangerous and I'm less likely to experience violence as a result of... I've been thinking a lot about getting documents changed and gender markers and things like that and what are the consequences if my documents don't match and I think the consequences are less because I'm White.

Although race was clearly a defining aspect of the experiences and masculinities of trans*masculine students of color, White trans*masculine students appeared less aware of how Whiteness influenced their experiences and masculinities. Those that were aware, spoke most about the visibility of masculinities like their own both in cis and trans* spaces, and usually had experiences connecting with trans* people of color in gaining that awareness. Thus, understanding one's own experiences with cissexism and genderism does not necessarily translate to understanding one's experiences with racism for most White trans*masculine students.

Summary

Having been exposed to and continuing to be surrounded by dominant masculinities, trans*masculine college students are exploring and crafting deviated possibilities of masculine pathways. This chapter presented one of these pathways of disorientation (Ahmed, 2006) and disidentification (Muñoz, 1999), as informed by their many intersecting and salient identities and realities. Even within and across these pathways, trans*masculine college students are not immune to genderism and its collusion with other forms of oppression, including sexism, racism, ableism, and classism. Models of positive and non-oppressive masculinities and masculine spaces within and outside of higher education, as well as connections to their various histories and cultures provided them with encouragement and opportunities to reflect on the types of masculinities and manhoods they wished to embody. Additional pathways and sub-pathways are explored in the next chapters.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS ON REORIENTED (TRANS*)MASCULINE EMBODIMENTS

The previous chapter explored the racialized pathways that trans*masculine college students took on to (re)define their gendered identities (see Appendix I). This chapter continues with the second pathway, the reoriented (trans*)masculine embodiments, and its subpathways. Similar to those explored in chapter 5, this pathway and its sub-pathways are not ordinal, but rather emerge and re-emerge at different times and can occur concurrently. This is both true for within the pathway, as well as in relation to the other two pathways.

Reoriented (Trans*)Masculine Embodiments

Many of the participants in the study talked about deconstructing and reconstructing (their) masculinities, their identities being in constant negotiation and formation mode as they learned and unlearned scripts they were exposed to or were trying on for fit. Blake struggled with describing masculinity, wondering,

[i]f you can have positive masculinities, and if that's possible within the system of gender and sexism. I don't know, I feel like there's a lot of negative connotations with masculinity... [even as] masculinity has been freeing for me in some ways, where it's part of breaking these norms that I think are oppressive. Then also recognition that by embodying masculinity, I'm also embodying other norms that are oppressive to other people.

Seth enjoyed the difficulty of defining masculinity and attributed being trans* to that sense of joy.

There's just so many ways you can look at it. It's really complex... it's nice that it's complex, that you can't really pin it down. It's part of the richness of it being your identity that changes from day to day... [Being trans* is] definitely a journey you keep learning and relearning.

Jack also talked about his “framework of masculinity [being] completely situated in a trans* lens.” This made it impossible for him to “talk about masculinity without talking about spectrums because it's like I was the person who traveled across the spectrum... I *see* the spectrum.” Blake was motivated to think “a lot about other forms of masculinity that I hope to create and embody in the future.” Similarly, RJ focused on how to embody a non-oppressive masculinity, and talked about reconceptualizing how masculinity is dominantly understood in order to do so. They said, “Once I push beyond what I've internalized from cultural messages of society or my culture... I can see that there is inner and outer strength and beauty with [masculinity].” For them, this has meant “centering vulnerability” within masculinity and being able to “go out in the world and embody something that is positive instead of a taking up of space in this like negative way, but a taking up of space, that is... beautiful, for a lack of a better word.”

For RJ there have been both internal and external forces that have allowed them to redefine and reconstruct their masculinity. Internally, they talked about their continuously shifting faith journey influencing their embodiment of masculinity. At various points in their life, RJ has practiced or identified with Catholicism, agnosticism, Islam, atheism, Esperitismo or “Puerto Rican Caribbean spirituality,” and indigenous rituals, and gained exposure to Judaism through their brother's conversion. They

attributed their multi-faith journey and refusal to “attach gender to God” to their propensity to “embody my body, my identities [as] like this collective background of things.”

Additionally, RJ attributed seeing masculinities as plural, as a collection of many things and ways of being, and as “expressing yourself in a way that is not heteronormative or homonormative” to

the beauty of trans*masculine-of-center. I get a lot of my strength and definitions from what I see from other trans* bois or other MOCs [masculine-of-center] or genderqueers that are expressing other forms of masculinity. From that there, that’s where I grab onto what’s comfortable for me and my body and how I want to look.

Stephen had a revelation in terms of the plurality of masculinities and masculine embodiments when he followed his friend’s suggestion to watch *Paris Is Burning* (Finch, Lacy, & Livingston, 1990), a documentary chronicling New York’s drag scene in the 1980s.

It was another eye-opener when I first realized I could change my body, that was like mind blowing and it was another kind of, I would never see that kind of masculinity where I was if I had stayed in [home state] my entire life I would not have seen that kind of masculinity. The butch queen was amazing to me, oh my God... drag culture has been really amazing for me... I think it’s helped move a lot of the things I think are just inherently true about myself, just the queenier parts if you will, away from being a shameful thing that I feel about myself to of an empowering kind of thing.

Paris Is Burning (Finch, Lacy, & Livingston, 1990) centered particularly on ball culture and voguing, scenes that were created and dominated by queer, trans*, and gender non-conforming people of color, many of whom were homeless or housing insecure. The individuals on the screen later came to life for Stephen at his job at a community health center where he did youth outreach events, serving similar populations.

I did outreach at this party and it was just like, I mean these kids were just like doing the most amazing things with masculinity. It was just incredible just the way they were moving their bodies and talking about themselves and the way that they presented, it was incredible. Just so creative, it just kind of like blew my mind.

Kyle as well was interested in an “expressive” masculinity, one that involved “dancing and singing and poetry, and kind of giving room for myself to be expressive.”

In addition to being seen, there is also a need to voice that a plurality of masculinities exists and are all valid, particularly when some masculinities or masculine people also embody femininity in some way. Although, some may assume this goes without saying in campus queer spaces, Coffee Bean’s preconceived notions of what it means to be queer or trans* might tell us otherwise.

So I came [into the campus LGBTQ resource center, the trans* people group and the queer and trans* people of color group] with all of this bullshit in my head, like, well I guess I can’t be queer if I’m really effeminate. I guess I can’t be trans*, if I’m not really super, hyper-masculine. And that was a space where I walked in with my bullshit and people were cool with me sorting it out. That was the first time I ever heard someone say, ‘you know what, the way people look at you and the way people think about you, that’s their fucking problem. That’s not your problem.’ And I was so used to picking other people’s problems as though they were my own.

In Coffee Bean’s case, the campus queer spaces they engaged with helped them work out some of their ideas and limitations on gender identity and expression. Others found they could utilize the privileging of masculinity in queer spaces to leverage agency and action, such as Daniel, who said,

As a student and as a student organizer being masculine allows more things for me because people expect me to take up space. People are sort of more interested in what I have to say based on that identity and people are more interested in meeting with me for those things. Which is frustrating because it shouldn’t be that way but it does help me get work done so there’s that.

Mohammad also acknowledged how dominant understandings of masculinity have helped him and expressed how he has in turn redefined and made them his own. He described himself as a competitive person, something he believed others interpreted as a masculine trait, which pushed him academically, stating,

I think in that sense masculinity, just like striving towards the goal, finishing college, which I still have to do – I have a year left – striving towards like being successful and in my terms successful means helping others. I think that masculinity in a lot of ways helped me with that. Society's ideas of masculinity has helped me with that... I want to be a teacher. I really enjoy teaching. And I think it's one of the best things you can do to help the revolution, whatever you think that is. Because you're really teaching the next generation and education is like really important.

Thus Mohammad is simultaneously taking advantage of hegemonic masculine expectations of success and accomplishment, while redefining what success means – one that involves helping others and “the revolution” rather than just himself, something he had learned growing up among Arab communities as previously articulated. His aspirations to joining a feminized and care-based profession such as teaching furthers that redefinition. This practice in disidentification was in line with how he defined being masculine.

So for me being masculine, like embodying this masculine performance, it's kind of like, this is who I am. I'm a trans* guy, and kind of like, 'Fuck you and what you think of masculinity.' Also it just confuses the shit out of people, and I love it so much. All these bros, I don't know. I don't necessarily want to one-up guys, but I, well I don't try, but sometimes it's fun to one-up cisgender guys who think like they're the shit.

Jones had a similar almost confrontational attitude about redefining Christianity for the campus Christian dental association.

I almost wanted to join and be like hey I'm part of this too, what are you going to do about it? Try and stir up some, I don't know. I don't want to join it but I

wanted to join it just to show I'm also Christian. Change your idea about what a Christian is.

As Jones' quote suggests, reorienting one's embodiment of (trans*)masculinities was not a practice that could be neatly siloed as just about masculinity or just about gender.

Having the agency, desire, and ability to redefine identity for self and others was often tied to social position and how gender intersected and was influenced by identities such as class, (dis)ability status, religion, and sexuality. These intersections and influences are variably explored in the sub-pathways of fashion, sexuality and romance, (dis)ability, and non-binary masculinities.

Fashioned (Trans*)Masculinities

Jay partially attributed the evolution of what is considered fashionable for men to how he has observed changes in masculine representations on his campus from when he was a student the first time around.

No guy was wearing slim fit tight pants 15 years ago. I don't know, it's funny, it's like the 80's with all the hair bands and you know all that kind of stuff. You look back now and people would be like, 'That was real. You wanted to be whatever...' But I just feel like, 'That was real gay' know what I'm saying? Those dudes were... but they were seen as the most masculine guys around with their tight spandex and flowy hair and shit.

In addition to time, Jay talked about how his own physical appearance gendered and sexualized his clothing and then him, despite the articles of clothing not changing significantly.

I think it's interesting now because I can wear the same thing I was wearing prior to the transition. If I wore it then [before transition] people would be like, 'Oh you're kind of butch' and I wear it now and it's like, 'oh you're just some dude wearing clothes.' A lot of times people assume I'm queer anyway based on my gender presentation. So I guess in a way it's changed a little bit but in a way it hasn't changed. Kind of generally wear the same type of stuff, it's just being perceived differently.

Jay thus named observations he made on what was and is considered masculine attire, queer and gay clothing, and how those gendered and sexualized meanings and ascriptions change based on the bodies they cover – or people’s assumptions of what types of bodies they cover. The notion that dress is not always about others and can be about self-expression and determination of our own bodies was one that showed up for many of the study participants. However, this notion as well carried with it certain privileges and/or a sense of self independent of others, which not all participants shared. James, who often struggled with wanting to be seen as masculine and often not getting the impression that that was the case, experienced redefinitions as dependent on others. He enjoyed seeing short men like Kevin Hart in the media, because it showed him that “being short doesn’t take away from” being masculine, and that he could redefine how he saw himself, until he had to interact with others.

I see myself as like a pretty big, pretty dominant masculine guy and I always get knocked down a peg when I’m leaving my classroom and I’m around the guys, when I’m sitting next to a guy we’re level. So I know more than you so I’m actually above you, but when we stand up to leave class and he keeps standing up and I’ve already stood up it’s like that quick like, ‘fuck you, you’re small.’ Or when I’m in the gym. Like I’m getting ready in my room and I have an old [chest compression] binder that I used in the gym and... I’m like feeling really buff in the mirror for a second and like ‘hell yeah’ and then I go to the gym and these guys are in shirtless sleeves and I’m like fuck.

James could see himself the way he wanted to be seen when wearing his binder and gym attire, as long as others were not around. He could compete with other masculine people with his intellect more so than with his body. As someone who did not identify as masculine, but wanted to be seen as male, Peter sought out masculine traits such as “short hair, suits, broad shoulders... so that people will read me as male.” He

lamented that had he been born a cis man, he would have the freedom to present and identify himself more as femme and have long hair.

But just because in order for society to recognize me as male and as valid I have to hyper masculinize myself, which I mean sucks... Sometimes I'm like no, I'm going to dress however I want. I recently had a long asymmetrical haircut and occasionally I'd put on eyeliner because I'm like, 'Screw gender norms, I'm male and people can't tell me what I want' and then like two people call me miss and I start crying. So then I'm like, I'm going to cut off all my hair.

Peter described the distinctions for him between his gender and his expression, when he thought about what masculinity meant to him. He said,

As I've grown in my gender identity, labels like masculine and feminine have just been less important to me. Then again the androgyny is still important to me but I feel like that's more of an aesthetic than something intrinsic. Like my maleness is very intrinsic. That [male] is what I am and androgyny is my aesthetic and how I choose to present... I feel like I view masculinity as an aesthetic and not something innate, so when trying to describe what does it mean to me, I'm like, suits.

Peter wanted to bring out his femininity and subdue masculinity in how he expresses himself, but often finds his self-concept as a male comes into conflict with others' ideas of what femininity communicates about his gender, which was tied to his trans*ness. He believed that cisgender men on the other hand can rely on already being assigned male to not have feminine attire necessarily gender them as women. Along those lines, Blake had just started hormone replacement therapy and was considering the pending changes to their gender expression and how "once I'm physically more masculine, my gender expression will become more feminine, because I want to continue to challenge those gender norms and expectations." When asked what that looked like for them, Blake discussed wearing "more floral prints and things that are pink. Things

that people don't expect men to wear. And like shorter shorts and things like that I guess, that's just queering this idea of masculinity that people have in their head."

The idea that to redefine and reconstruct masculinity is a privileged ability is thus partially tied to physicality and physical transition, which in itself is not always accessible or desired. RJ talked about not being able to access transition regardless of whether they wanted to or not, because "medically, my own body, I just can't take testosterone. I've come to radically accept that. It's been hard." To offset that, RJ finds power and redefinition through binders and jewelry. They talked about "always wear[ing] jewelry" such as "earrings and stuff and some other MOCs are not too comfortable doing that. I don't see folks with earrings." It was in the mornings in particular when they would bind for the day that they would,

begin to express my own way and form of masculinity. That is the most powerful and yet painful piece of it at the same time. I feel like, yeah, awesome, I'm empowering and feel strong that I have something to wear... But then right before I wear it, I'm looking in the mirror and just seeing something that I'm uncomfortable with seeing.

James recognized some privilege inherent even in the use and access to binders. For him, his size and his socioeconomic status provided him with unearned benefits that others did not experience. In terms of his size, which he had previously expressed being a source of emasculation for him, he realized that "since I'm skinny, it's really easy for me to pass and when I bind it's a non-issue." He compared himself to another trans*masculine person who was bigger than him and thus found it hard to bind. Additionally, his socioeconomic status as upper middle class allowed him to access binders and "men's clothes" without having to involve his disapproving parents in the process, who were "not really checking what I'm using my money on."

Class privilege was something Blake and Gabriel thought about as well in terms of fashioning their (trans*)masculinities. In terms of thinking about their gender development and sense of comfort with their gender, Blake shared that,

I was able to buy basically a whole new wardrobe and that is an immense privilege that I was able to do that. I think I would have had a lot harder of a time if I hadn't been able to do that... I think it's also the way that I dress and presented myself also shaped the friend group that I developed. And I felt like lesbians flocked to me because of this look that I had which was largely related to the fact that I had money to buy clothes.

Thus their upper class socioeconomic status afforded them new clothes, which also provided them with a social and dating network that they perceived would have been inaccessible to them otherwise. Gabriel on the other hand focused on how his upper class background gave him more variability in masculine presentations, attributing certain types of work and linked aesthetics as associated with being working class, being physically fit, and survival. He said,

I think because I am from an upper-class family I had more flexibility in my masculinity. I wasn't required... the masculinity wasn't how you dress a certain way because you need to have protective gear on in order to do this job that you need to be physically fit for because it's hard work. So I think I've been awarded more flexibility, because it's not a survival thing.

Although RJ, as someone who identified as poor and working class, lamented on their lack of access to clothing specifically geared towards masculine of center bodies, they also embraced their working class learnings, such as how to be frugal. Empowered by their ability to save and perplexed by the existence of expensive clothing, RJ stated that,

I don't need all that expensive shit... I would never be able to go to a place that sells suits for specifically queer people, because it would be expensive as fuck. Even though I would love to do that... to get it fitted, to do all these things, but like something like that would be inaccessible for me.... sometimes I feel bad

because I can't support my own queer community, but then I push back because it shouldn't be that expensive in the first place. Just go to Sears or something, buy a cheap ass suit and it will last long... [laughs].

In addition to class, and at times embroiled with it, race also underlay how Earl fashioned his (trans*)masculinity. He described himself as a dandy, as he “wear[s] bowties and suspenders every day.” Earl’s dandy stylings pushed against what it meant to be a Black man on his campus, which often led to reinterpretations of his sexuality.

Because I did not really look like too many other Black guys they would encounter on campus, I was quickly labeled as everybody thought I was gay. They thought I was the gay dude, but that was I think that was weird for them. To see a dude that is wearing a bowtie every day. I wear suspenders; I wear a pinky ring that probably didn't help either. So that was kind of how people took me in so I thought that was interesting just because it was so outside the norm that I had to be gay basically.

Bastian’s use of attire to communicate masculinity related to religion, as he began to explore Judaism. “I began to wear a kippah and eventually I did convert so that’s an outward sign I guess... for me that was part of me I guess asserting my masculinity as I was coming out.” Coffee Bean used clothing to symbolize their own masculinity, one that was less patriarchal than the one they had envisioned for themselves in the past. Previously they had “wanted to be more like Marlon Brando kind of cool, like patriarch kind of masculine.” They pointed to the bowtie they were wearing and said,

But at this moment I think of myself more of like my bowtie. It’s masculine, certainly, or at least in the context, the way I’ve placed it and everything, it’s masculine, but it’s got polka dots on it so it’s kind of fruity. Like it’s fun because it’s polka dots, I’ve always liked polka dots, but it’s still a nice muted color. I think of my masculinity as like I’m not interested in being this super mega butchy... like I’m not interested in that, I just want to be me and be super geeky and wear bowties and look super dorky.

Similar to Earl’s dandy style, Coffee Bean’s style also differentiated them and their masculinity from the “dude-bros” that they abhorred. They described themselves as

really “vigilant about my outfit... it has everything to do with how I think of my masculinity and how I think, like, me being a dude-bro in sweats is unacceptable. No, that’s not me, no.” Less explicitly than Coffee Bean, other participants also talked about emulating masculine aesthetics that did not conform to dominant campus masculine performativities. Charles, who admired his father and wanted to be like him even as a child thought of

cowboy boots in my head when I think about masculinity... because of my dad... He wore cowboy boots, denim jeans, he wore flannel shirts... So I looked like the little girl version of my dad and I now look like the little boy version of my dad.

Others elicited images in the media and society in general rather than people they personally knew. Eli was inspired from a character in *Pacific Rim* (del Toro & Greene, 2013) whom he described as “kind of the tweedy professor type... I feel like that sort of aesthetic is the masculinity archetype I look towards.” Jack named “male-identified photographers” as his greatest stylist influencers in terms of masculine presentation, “especially outdoorsman enthusiasts because I was like, ‘Oh, that’s my style.’ I don’t think it’s inherently masculine, but that kind of masculinity is what I want to show... always dressing for multiple environments.”

Fashion was as much about communicating and asserting masculinity, as it was about masking femininity or resisting feminine expectations for some participants. A few talked about using opportunities through a specific event, music, or even weather to cover up or dismiss femininity on their bodies. Demian talked about feeling their most masculine during their high school senior pictures when they bucked expectations and received validation for the way they looked when they did so.

I went out and got a nice suit, it was good. Instead of getting the dress everybody wanted me to wear... I liked it because part of it was, there is a rebellious component to it, but then at the same time, this is something that I like; I actually enjoyed the way I looked in it... it was great and people were like, 'You look great!' and I was like, 'Yeah, I do!'

As a youth, Earl resisted feminine and fashioned expectations through clothing associated with grunge – an alternative rock subculture in the 1980s – with which he identified.

Like straight up I was a grunge kid. That was really, you know kind of like, interesting because there was a struggle in my household about me not wanting to dress the way my mom wanted me to dress gender wise, but then also fashion wise period. Just like I'm going to wear this shirt and these jeans every fucking day you know.

James, who went to school in the Northeast, usually hated winter. However, he had an appreciation for the season because of "the layers I can put on... so I feel like in the winter I feel more masculine." Participants found fashion to be a vehicle they could use to communicate, assert, reconstruct, and resist varying levels of masculinities and femininities, expected and unexpected of them. Class in particular, as well as race and religion, mediated their abilities to do so.

Sexua-Romanticized (Trans*)Masculinities

It was almost impossible for many participants to talk about gender and masculinity without discussing sexuality and relationships, as is evident by the length and depth of this section. Participants talked about their masculinity in terms of roles (imposed, desired, and their closeness to power) in romantic and sexual relationships, their sexual identities (assumed, imposed, and fluidness), and ways they and others saw themselves as (a)sexual beings. For example, when James first began to disclose his trans* identity to others and express his masculinity, a fellow intern at the Human Rights

Campaign (a national gay rights organization) asked him, “since you identify as trans* now, do you identify as straight?” James’ fellow intern assumed that James’ identity as a masculine-presenting man went hand-in-hand with heterosexuality. This practice often invisibilizes trans* identities. It may also account for the ease with which sexuality came up and fused with conversations on masculinity with participants in this study. When thinking about what he would say to a younger version of himself, Jack quickly said,

‘Don’t assume that masculinity means heterosexuality.’ I think at the time I thought it meant, ‘Oh, to be a masculine man means to be straight,’ that’s always sort of the assumption... There’s this perceivedness of masculinity being heterosexual and femininity being homosexual in men.

These misperceptions of equating femininity in men with being gay, limited Peter’s ability to express his gender and sexuality on his own terms. On the one hand, Peter’s feminine expressions of his male identity signal to others that he is not attracted to women. On the other, when he is with women, his trans* and male identities signal to others that he is supposed to play a dominant role in the relationship, which “doesn’t work out” because he is “a pretty submissive person.” The ability to take on roles that fit rather than get prescribed have brought Kyle a lot of joy. When he talked about the openness and confidence that his masculinity garnered him, he talked about how it influenced

intimacy in the fact of being more comfortable with... taking whatever role I think fits me rather than a role that I think that I have to do, because then I’m doing something that I might not even be good at, and that’s not fun for anybody!

Often, what roles trans*masculine college students played or were expected to play in relationships and sexual encounters interplayed with the gender identities and expressions of others, as well as their sexual orientations. Jack, who recently started

dating cishet women, compared what his current relationship looked and felt like as compared to queer relationships he had been in previously. Referring to a recent relationship with a cishet woman who had “no idea” about trans* people prior to dating Jack, he said,

Her expectations of me are a lot more normative than I’ve experienced in other relationships, because she really doesn’t care about the trans* piece. I mean, she’s like, ‘I care about it because it’s part of who you are, but other than that I really don’t care. You want to talk about your experience being trans*, great, go ahead.’ Whereas in queer relationships I find that sometimes the relationship is justified because of my trans*ness, you know? I dated someone... who very strongly identified as a queer person and was just like so like uncomfortable that we appeared heteronormative to everyone else, that our relationship was justified because I was trans*, to her.

Jack described heteronormative expectations as him playing “the provider and caretaker role in terms of going out on dates and paying for them... She really wants to have your typical straight, homogenous, heterosexual relationship... she wants children and stuff in the future,” which he described as different and less egalitarian than previous relationships, but neither as necessarily better or less comfortable than the other. In this relationship, Jack’s trans* identity is at least irrelevant, if not invisible altogether, to maintain the appearance and feel of heteronormativity, whereas in the previously held relationship with a queer person, his trans* identity had to be emphasized and highlighted in order to resist the appearance and feel of heteronormativity. In both cases, Jack’s trans*ness retreats or comes to the forefront based on the other person’s sexual orientation. Jack also shared that “how I show up as myself in relationships hasn’t changed... I just feel how other people perceive me in relationships has changed.” This sentiment of externally imposed expectations extended to relationships with men as well. In Stephen’s romantic or sexual encounters with men,

I've found that there are so many ideas about what it means to be masculine, especially be[ing] masculine with other men... I find that I just have, it gets to me in some ways, but in other ways I find myself able to deflect because I feel like I already went through that kind of fucked up indoctrination into what... it means to be butch or femme or masculine or whatever, a top or a bottom or whatever those things are and you know like when people say you can't be a top because you don't have a dick and it's like well, okay, you know. I don't know if I'm just getting older or if it's just less room in my emotional... I think I have better boundaries in all these things.

Stephen is speaking to some of the ways that romantic and sexual relationships are employed in ongoing gender socializing, even in queer relationships that may or may not wish to resist heteronormative ideals. In lieu of roles defined by a person's gender identity in cishet relationships (i.e., men's and women's roles), queer relationships often define roles by gender expression (i.e., femininity and masculinity). In the case of trans*masculine people, like Stephen, there is an assumption that in a cis-trans* relationship between two masculine individuals, the trans* person will play a more submissive (i.e., feminine, or bottom in reference to sexual encounters) role. Daniel and his partner similarly discussed the penis centric way we think about sex and relationships in terms of their own sex lives and how "we should be talking about the clitoris a little bit more."

Additionally, Stephen was referring to his own journey with gender and sexuality, when talking about his capacity to filter through some of these externally imposed expectations and resist them when they do not make sense for him rather than accept them at face value. Kyle, in relationship with a cis man, similarly talked about learning from his journey with masculinity to adopt what makes sense for him and let go of what does not to be his "kind of masculine in a relationship." He shared that,

I still have to let go of the ideas of, ‘Ok, if I do this what does it mean, am I doing what men do in same gender in their relationships? Am I fulfilling the right role?’ My masculinity kind of puts me in check and says, ‘No, stop thinking about that, that’s not important as long as you’re both having fun, as long as you’re both comfortable, as long as you are both enjoying this, that’s what matters.’ That in itself is refreshing. It makes things a lot more interesting. That means there’s more conversation and things evolve over time. So if things change, obviously, we can talk about [it] instead of it just being like, ‘Well I guess it’s always been like this, so oh well.’ No, we can talk about this.

Daniel expressed the importance of talking about roles and practices as he navigated his first serious relationship with a woman, as someone who identifies as queer and “pretty exclusively been interested in other male-identified people.”

I think about how I show up in space with her. We’re in the very beginning stages of things where we haven’t even really negotiated what our relationship is but I think about what does it look like if I put my arm around you in public when we’re with friends? What does it look like in public at all? And what does it look like me for a person that’s been romantically submissive to ask a woman out as a man?

Daniel was speaking to being intentional about roles and how certain practices, such as placing his arm around a partner, might be read by others, as a way to be intentional about interrogating how his privilege as a masculine person might present itself. Blake also talked about being intentional in relationships with feminine people. They shared that “I try to be mindful of the ways that gender roles and sexism surface in those relationships, like romantic relationships. But also recognizing that I’m sure they surface in ways that I’m sure I don’t realize.” As an example of the latter, they noticed how their self-consciousness heightened when they were with another non-binary person who is read as male by others according to Blake.

I had like all this come up when I started [dating] them that I hadn’t realized was a thing for me. So when we’re in public I was much more self-conscious about holding hands with them and showing PDA [public displays of affection] because

I was... that felt more dangerous almost to show physical affection in public with someone else who is a gender non-conforming person.

In addition to not knowing how they were being read in terms of gender and sexuality, and whether their presence together jeopardized their safety, Blake was also talking about their self-consciousness about their masculinity in comparison to the other person. Bastian, married to another trans*masculine person, also compared his and his partner's differing enactments of masculinities. While Kyle and Stephen talked about expectations of submissiveness in sexual and romantic relationships almost interchangeably, Bastian differentiated how those two dimensions played out in his relationship with his husband.

Maybe because I'm more stubborn I've kind of fallen into this relationship in our marriage where I will kind of be a little more overbearing on decisions and inflexible. I mean, I can be persuaded sometimes but I kind of feel like I take on a more stereotypically masculine role in our relationship dynamics. Although I'm not in the bed but in the rest.

Thus Bastian played a submissive role sexually, but a more dominant role in other aspects in his relationship, roles he attributed more to personality and desires rather than expectations tied to gender identity or presentation. James on the other hand talked about how he has changed how he shows up in relationships and how he found it "way easier acting the girl role." He referred to being "in the man's role" as feeling "obligated to even though she's now my ex-girlfriend, if we go out for lunch I'm going to pay for her lunch. I mean I know we're not together, but I'm the guy and I got this." Thus, societally communicated expectations were internalized by James as someone who has expressed affinity towards gender roles, even as he located a feeling of obligation rather than want in terms of paying for lunch. These lessons of what it means to be a masculine person or a man in a relationship were ones Gabriel was taught early on in relationships.

I remember learning about masculinity from like my very femme woman partner, where I learned how to be a good butch and it wasn't like inherent to me – it was like I carried the things, I was a top. And those are all masculine, those were all butch. I think in some ways it really opened my eyes to a lot of different ways to be, but in some ways it also felt kind of like a role, and at this point in my life I don't feel like I need to ascribe to any of those things. But as a younger person it definitely shaped a lot of things about how I felt about being a man, about how I felt about people relating my body, you know all these things. I basically felt like I had to be a stone butch. Coupled with all of my own sort of shame and discomfort with my body, there was the shame of feeling like I shouldn't want to be touched, because that was not butch and that wasn't the top.

Gabriel felt susceptible to the ways this particular partner was teaching him about masculinity and manhood during a developmental time for him. Although the relationship validated his masculinity and allowed for it to exist and be explored, it also limited how he was supposed to act sexually. As a trans* person who was experiencing some “shame and discomfort” with his body, these lessons manifested in harmful internalizations around sexual roles and needing to reject touch and desire. Jones' experience in a relationship with a “femme-identified lesbian” on the other hand,

boosted my confidence in so many ways by highlighting what she found attractive in my body. Like oh you're so muscular and that made me so happy. I didn't even realize that's what I needed. I was like, wow she sees my masculinity and compliments it and boosts my confidence so that really was a light bulb moment for me... the other times I dated other women they didn't highlight my masculinity so that was a definite turn off for me... The fact that I felt not loved or attractive when they did not talk about my masculinity was another light bulb moment.

Jones' and Gabriel's stories demonstrate that validating one's masculinity in a relationship can be an affirming experience when it centers that person's reality and body on their terms rather than crafting a masculinity that revolves only around the partners' femininity and femme identities. In fact, Jones talked about how identities themselves, or at least the labels used to describe them, can sometimes shift to reflect the romantic and

sexual partnerships one finds themselves in or desires, rather than expecting shifts in how partners themselves show up that do not reflect their sense of selves. In referring to the same person as in the previous quote, Jones said, that “her sexuality has been... expanding,” and Jones was able to think about how his own sexuality might also expand. He believed that,

two years ago I wouldn't have imagined dating a non-binary trans person or a trans* woman or all of those things... I think about my masculinity in terms of sexuality a lot nowadays. I think in the past week, how my sexuality does seem to be extending to include more identities. I also think a lot about how interesting it would be to meet someone at this point of my transition and for them to get to know me over a period of time and I'm definitely going to change physically, so thinking about that... Would I ever find cis guys interesting? Would gay guys think I'm kind of more, I guess more attractive [as I transition more] and what do I think of them?

Seeing how another person's identity was shifting as she was coming to understand her attraction towards Jones and at least one previous relationship she had with a trans*masculine person, allowed Jones to also imagine what his sexuality meant, particularly as his physicality begins to change. Jay was also thinking about shifting identities as it related to physical transition as he reflected on a recent conversation with a group of Black trans*masculine people. “We were talking and the topic [was] does T[estosterone] make you gay... It concluded with T does not make you gay but some people expand their shit.”

Jay was referring to how comfort in one's own sense of self, physically, emotionally, and so on, which hormone replacement therapy or taking testosterone might elicit, can allow for fluidity and openness to new and expansive ways of being with others. Kyle talked about this openness and expansion being a part of the lessons he has learned along the way about his masculinity and its relationship to his sexuality.

I've kind of always been attracted to other genders... It's very hard to try to be rigid in the way that I present myself... at Brown Bois I explained it as I was solely attracted to masculinity in women, but then transitioned to also being attracted to masculinity in men. Or masculinity in anyone. I can't act like I could be hard, because that doesn't necessarily work. I'm not going to find anybody, or no one that would fit me... I think in that, for my masculinity anyway, I couldn't pretend to just be one thing [in terms of sexuality]... cause I wasn't one thing. Even my attractions weren't just one thing. I wasn't going in just one direction; I was kind of everywhere. I guess I needed my masculinity to be everywhere with me.

The intertwining lessons that Kyle received about his masculinity and his sexuality extended beyond who he was or was not attracted to, but also in how he communicated his desires and needs to his partners, both romantically and sexually. He referred to this as being “really honest, maybe too honest... being very upfront” even with people he had just met because he was “so tired of settling!” Similarly, Coffee Bean shared that their masculinity has taught them that “you matter, your desires matter, your choices matter, and if there's something you don't feel comfortable with, that's okay.” They contrasted this with the lessons they had learned about what it meant to be a woman dating cishet men, particularly as a woman of color having dated White cishet men.

It's all about what they want and for me it was about bending myself backwards so that that person could be satisfied. And I would always put myself last and that was why I always thought sex was just horrible, disgusting, and terrible. Because it was always this exercise in someone else's desires and not mine.

When Kyle talked about how his masculinity has transformed his relationship with sex and intimacy he shared that it enabled him to...

communicate what I want to happen. If I want something to stop, I'll be like, 'nope, stop.' If I want something to keep going, being specific about what I want... I used to not say anything and get put in really horrible situations that I didn't even want to be in.

The significance of the ways that these students are talking about sexuality and their masculinities is tied to the role of sex in maintaining hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal status. As someone who identified as asexual and aromantic, Eli spoke to this when he said,

a lot of masculinity is tied up into sexualization or being sexual I guess as a power thing. So I've never identified with that, because I'm just not interested. So a lot of the power dynamics that comes from masculinity in sexual situations or anything like that just never really spoke to me.

Eli's sense of himself as a sexual being, or more aptly in his case as an asexual person, allowed him to dismiss the use of sex as a tool for dominance and status when it came to defining his masculinity. Daniel was frustrated when status would be conferred onto him by others because of assumptions about his sexuality when he was around women.

So sort of having the guy at the restaurant come up to you and be like you're so lucky to be going out with all these women and I'm like, that's great, I don't want to sleep with any of them and that's what you're talking about so maybe don't approach me in that way. But now I think I'm pretty often read as the gay best friend of the group which is frustrating but also helpful in that people aren't assuming that I'm carrying all these women around with me so I can sleep with them.

Not everyone dismissed or was frustrated by the conference of masculine status in relation to sexuality. James compared how masculinity gave him permission to be "more sexually open" as a man, particularly as a Black man. Admitting that he preferred to date women who are shorter than him ("it's a dominance thing"), he experienced "more of a sense of pride now [with sexuality] because I'm not a girl." It was important for James "being a guy, the Black guy" that others "know I'm sleeping with somebody." He described "being in public with" his best friend and "checking out random ass people" as

a bonding experience between them and something that made him “more confident and borderline cocky” and assumed that others were “into it... because we’re silly looking.” Here also, we see James inadvertently illuminate how women are taught not to feel a connection with or pride in their sexualities. Additionally, James has internalized the stereotype of the hypersexualized Black man, and the ways that sex or the prospect of sex with women connects men with each other, rather than with the women themselves. Again, there was recognition that there was something perhaps not altogether right here and that he “could probably do something about that,” but in this case James was willing to accept his behavior because it was not as bad as it could be.

Racist messaging of the hypersexualized Black man was not confined to heterosexual spaces. Jay talked about his experiences as a Black man on gay hookup apps, and how these racist messages also colluded with cissexist assumptions.

I’m on Adam4Adam... I tried Grindr and I was like, this is not for me. I’m not 20, I’m not White, I’m not some pretty boy, you know, I ain’t all that so let me get off here. But it’s really interesting, because I get stuff like... some guy hit me up like, let me see your package. How big is your dick, I bet you have a big dick. And it was like, big Black cock lover, you know what I’m saying?

Thus, as a Black face on a hookup app, others had racist and cissexist expectations of Jay that catered to their ideas of what Black men’s bodies look like and the utility of Black men’s bodies, if they are even welcome in the first place. Jay’s experiences also speak to the limits of language and the binary ways we understand both gender and sexuality. His presence on a gay hookup app signaled both “same-sex” desire, which could only come with a particular gendered assumption. Demian spoke to the limits of language when they said,

It had got to a point, and then I was like wait, sort of, the words heterosexual... homosexual? That's so stupid, oh my god. Because it's like, heterosexual is the opposite gender and I was out. What does that mean if I change my gender basically or change how I define it?

Particularly as someone who identified as being gender neutral, Demian struggled with negotiating labels in terms of their sexual orientation. They identified themselves as demisexual, which they described as being “by the technical definition of asexual, of not having an attraction to a person, I'm just ace. But sometimes I do still want to sleep with people, but like in different ways and different reasons.” Thus, demisexual communicated whether they were interested in sex, but not necessarily how gender (their own or of their partners) entered the equation due to a binary gender and sexuality world not having linguistic room for their non-binary gender identity. The term queer for many participants allowed a linguistic escape of the binary confines of sexuality regardless of whether they experienced attraction to one or more genders.

For others, the term queer communicated a cultural affiliation. Gabriel talked about the connection to community in his use of the word queer and “the reason why I don't just identify as a straight guy or whatever is because there's a certain level of queerness that grounds me in the community and the history of the community that I think is important.” Daniel, who was navigating a new-to-him heterosexual context, found ways to queer his relationship and masculinity through some of the intentional conversations he was having with his partner, which helped him find authenticity in that relationship.

I think as frustrating as it is, I think entering a heteroromantic situation gives me more contexts for [masculinity] and doing it in a queer way is nice... But like being read as in a heterosexual, heteroromantic relationship sort of, but doing that

in a way that feels authentic to me as opposed to a way that feels sort of forced is I think really helping that.

Stephen also felt some limitations with his queer sexuality being misread regardless of the context he found himself in and needing to alter his gender expression in order for his sexuality or at least his relationship with women to be recognized. Often this was connected to whether his trans* identity was known to others around him as well.

[E]ither people know that I'm queer and know that I'm trans* and like I find so much more room to just exist how I am. But if I'm worried about how people, like if I'm very concerned with people knowing that I actually mostly date women, like I have a significant partner who is a woman and if those things are important to me than I find myself toning down the sass, or whatever that is. I find myself kind of like selecting and especially in the context of being in a place where most of the men are gay or assumed to be gay, which I love... but that also means that I'm assumed to be something that is not entirely accurate and have to figure out how to just let that be or to clarify...

Stephen found that others' misperceptions disallowed "sass" to coexist with his current primary partnership with a woman. Those coexistences were possible only when his queer and trans* identities were known to those around him. Trans*masculine people in "heterosexual appearing relationships" as Jack described them, thus found that "most [LGBTQ] people peg [them] as part of the [queer] community, but can't quite put their thumb on" it and were confused about their sexualities. Seth, who identified as pansexual and "lean[s] gay," talked about this making it "hard to... find a date." Especially attending a traditionally women's college, Seth found it hard to date men since "there aren't many gay guys here. The gay guys that I've run into, well they're gay and I'm pretty off, so there's no overlap." Here, Seth was referring to his appearance as someone who is often not read as a man, especially being in the institutional context he was in, and

thus not being read by gay cis men as someone they might be interested in. They talked about missing the ease with which they could “find a boyfriend when you pass as a female and look like an attractive female,” however they also shared that in those relationships, “I always felt like a drag queen... it wasn’t them wanting me for who I was.”

The significance of being seen as his authentic gendered self in his relationship allowed Mohammad to combat some of his anxieties when dating women who had previously only dated cisgender men. In reference to those relationships, he said “so I like constantly compare myself to cisgender guys, and it like fucks with my mind.” In comparison,

With my current partner now, it’s fucking awesome because she’s the first person I’ve been intimate with who has really supported me in my transition. She uses male pronouns with me, she calls me her boyfriend. I don’t know, it’s just like really cool because I can feel like my full authentic self with her without being ashamed of myself kind of, or just like how I express myself.

How, and not just if, partners and potential partners affirm trans*masculine college students’ identities and bodies mattered in their capacity to feel whole in those relationships. Learnings from queer culture and identity pushed boundaries around masculinity and sexuality and how the two connected to each other. Feeling empowered and affirmed when it came to their masculinities translated to empowerment in their sexualities, including around consent and pleasure.

(Dis)Able (Trans*)Masculinities

Discussion of identities and bodies mattering was a salient one for study participants with disabilities. Trans*masculine students with various (dis)abilities talked about how their disabilities and experiences with ableism intersected with masculinities.

In most of these conversations there was a sense of conflict between disability and masculinity with the former having a diminishing effect on the latter, as tied to physicality and self-sufficiency, with few participants talking about how to reclaim their simultaneously masculine and (dis)abled bodies.

Jack described the Deaf community as being “like the queer community; it is very small, it is very tight-knit, everybody knows everybody’s business” and “there is a lot of pressure to fit in somewhere.” In describing his ongoing training as an interpreter, he described how he learned that American Sign Language (ASL) communicated more than what was being signed, but also said something about the interpreter’s gender and/or sexuality. Some of his first interactions with his fraternity brothers elicited questions about him being gay. When he asked them why they thought so, they said, “Oh, it’s because of the way you sign. You seem like you’re a little bit effeminate.” Through this experience and weekly meetings with a Deaf interpreter to work on his ASL, Jack learned that,

Most Deaf people do have an affect and accent in signing, just in the same way that there is an affect and accent for speaking [English], and so in the same way it’s like if I want to read really straight male my voice is not going to go up and down, up and down. There’s that same sort of tonality in sign language that happens, there is a certain affect that comes across in sign language that indicates a male or feminine affect. I have a very feminine way of signing. That’s interesting too – my masculinity is also embodied in my signing. The feminine way of signing is really in my background of learning it itself. Most teachers of ASL are women. I learned the language from women, and women have a very unique way of signing.

Jack talked about having to relearn ASL in the fraternity so as to communicate more effectively with his brothers. Much of this relearning occurred in his weekly meetings with an interpreter. When Jack signed something using the “feminine way of

pointing,” she jumped in and said, “get that out of your language, because that’s not how men sign.” This was contrasted with a cisgender gay student whose “style of signing is classically effeminate,” which Jack described as mimicking stereotypical hand gesturing in English being translated into his hand movements in ASL. This student was used as an example for Jack to understand the manifestation of masculinity in relationship with heterosexuality within Deaf culture.

My mentor was saying, ‘So you know that guy? He’s doing feminine signing and he is owning it, but that’s his thing.’ I’m like, ‘Yeah that makes sense,’ so she was like, ‘So do you want to look like him, or like this other guy?’ ‘I think I want to look like that other guy.’ ‘Ok, then get that out of your language.’ That’s how masculinity is playing out for me right now.

Bastian expressed the most concern about the impact of his disability on his masculinity. When talking about not being able to find work, he described feeling “a little bit diminished... I suppose that is probably in relation to my masculinity.” Bastian was relying on notions of men as providers and “being able to be self-sufficient” and found those conflicted with his “need to rely so much on assistance.” Although he shared that this did not make him feel “less of a man,” he nonetheless wanted to be “not so reliant on assistance and... able to provide for others that are on assistance.” Blake thought about their arthritis and how it might impact them in the future. They attributed struggling to build muscle and thus embodying a more masculine physique to having arthritis. Thinking about how arthritis has shaped their body thus far, made them think about their body in “the future and kind of wondering what is going to happen and not being sure.” The possibility of future physical constraints already had Blake wondering what that might mean for their masculinity and their embodiment of it.

Beyond physical manifestations, Jay talked about his mental health as someone with bipolar disorder and it feeling different now as a man. He referred to mental health being something that is stigmatized and not something he is often able to talk about openly, outside of a few people “who know me.” When he thought about how people’s perceptions of him and mental health differ by their understandings of his gender, he shared

I definitely think that prior to transitioning, when talking to people about it they were like, they were concerned, but I don’t know. I think now it’s assumed that... people kind of jump and assume, ‘Oh you must be volatile,’ you know?

Whereas Jay’s mental health diagnosis has not changed – he had bipolar disorder both before and after transition – others’ meaning-making of his disorder shifted from concern for him to concern for their own safety around him. It is worth questioning also whether Jay being recognized as a Black man in particular furthered reading him as “volatile.” The colluding intersections of ableism, cissexism, sexism, and racism can make embodying oneself authentically “as a POC, as disabled, and as trans*” particularly challenging, one that shows up daily for RJ.

I try to embody my disabilities as best I can, as annoying as they are and frustrating or painful, in the ways in which I exist in this world and walk in this world... Sometimes that means using a cane. Sometimes that means going to physical therapy. Sometimes that means my going to therapy. That has meant getting help when I need it, but it has also meant that vulnerability, and for me that masculinity and my own definition and reclaiming of it is allowing myself to ask for help when I need it, and to know what that is to me what that looks like, what that feels like, what I need.

RJ named the deep inaccessibility of self-care for themselves existing at the intersections of many marginalized identities. However, it was in being vulnerable and asking for help, something Bastian found difficult to do, that RJ sought to have their

masculinity not be diminished by ableist notions of what it means to be masculine. Thus, trans*masculine students are finding that dominant notions of masculinity conflict in many ways with disability. They are differentially internalizing or resisting these conflicts, as they continue negotiating what it means to embody a (dis)abled masculine body.

Non-Binary (Trans*)Masculinities

What it means to embody a masculine body or identity was also a space of negotiation and resistance for students who explored and pushed for non-binary ways of being and understanding themselves and their masculinities and/or manhoods. What it meant to be or present in non-binary ways also differed for participants. For some, being non-binary was about identity such as Coffee Bean and Blake who identified as non-binary trans*masculine individuals. For others it was about expression and aesthetics, such as Peter, who identified as male but not masculine. And for others still, like Demian, it crossed all over, or as they said, “It’s just so much about blurring all the distinctions between whatever.”

Contending with binaries in both cis and trans* contexts, in campus environments and non-campus environments made many students feel silenced, unsafe, othered, and bore an emotional toll on them. Often these binaries emerged in being misgendered or not seeing an appropriate gender option for them in forms or housing or Greek life. Blake made some decisions about how much they spoke, because of how often people would misgender them after hearing their voice.

I’ve been thinking about why I’m so quiet and I think part of that is because when I’m existing in the world on a day-to-day basis, people perceive me one way and

then when I speak people perceive me in a totally different way that I don't really want them to perceive me in. Which is part of why I'm going on testosterone and things like that. So I think part of negotiating masculinity in public spaces has been not speaking for me because my voice is what people perceive as more feminine. Even things like the ways that I show excitement, I feel like people almost, even my friends make fun of me or something when I get really excited. Because my voice, I sound like a girl because that is the voice that I have and when I get excited and I'm not thinking about it is when it's most expressive, so I mean I think part of negotiating masculinity has been negotiating the way that I express myself and don't. I think that is fucked up and frustrating. So that's part of why I'm excited to be going on testosterone. I feel like I will be able to express a wider range of emotions without people challenging my gender based on that.

Reflections, such as the one shared by Blake here, demonstrate how misgendering silences voices, figuratively and literally, that do not conform to the gender binary and forces students to make decisions about their masculinities and how they perform them in order to avoid getting misgendered. Gender policing also led to many participants talking about how their lives would be different, namely easier, if they fit either a cis or trans* binary. Seth talked about how his parents “haven't really internalized” Seth's trans* identity, because ze “doesn't really resonate with *just* masculinity.” Demian thought about their future and the difficulties they might encounter as a non-binary person when searching for work and how “it would be easier to... be more... normal,” equating normalcy with fitting into the gender binary. When thinking about their masculinity at their institution, Coffee Bean described it as “not even valid... because my masculinity is not enough, it's not man enough.” With the increasing awareness of the existence of binary trans* people, Coffee Bean believed “it would be much easier if I just said I'm a trans*man, my pronouns are he/him/his,” because “that's almost seen, that's known and OK, I know what to do with you.”

Feelings of not being masculine, or man, or trans* enough resonated as well for students who did identify in more binary ways or at least with the term man. Stephen talked about feeling “a lot of pressure to *not* conform to standards of masculinity” from trans*masculine individuals in his life early on in his process, which led him to not pursue medical transition for longer than he would have otherwise.

And it was very sort of radical, queer stuff that I, in theory, really agree with. I think in some ways, though, it was almost kind of damaging because the bulk of people I think experience pressure to transition or pressure to do medical things and I felt like I had to sort of like apologize for my desire to do that, in some ways.

Thus, while many non-binary identified individuals talked about the pressure to conform to normative ideas of masculinity and manhood, Stephen experienced the pressure to conform to non-conformity. Potentially, in the efforts to create space and legitimacy for non-binary identities and expressions, the community Stephen found himself in delegitimized medical transition as conformist. Jack talked about feeling “a lot of norm and passing guilt,” because of similar experiences that Stephen had that made him feel not trans* enough.

I felt like I had to not be as masculine as I wanted to be, because people were looking down on acting straight, you know what I mean? Feeling that pressure was also an interesting place to be in. I feel this one tug from this cisgender male world and this other tug from the queer gender male world where it's like, ‘You're supposed to be like this,’ ‘No, you're supposed to be like this!’ It was like, ‘Ahhh, stop it!’ I still get that today, I'll meet people who are trans* and they'll be like, ‘Oh, you're trans*? Hmmmm,’ and they get kind of judgy about it. I'll be like, ‘Don't judge, you don't know where I came from and how much shit I've gone through in [my home state].’

Blake spoke to there being particular narratives and scripts in place both in cishet, as well as queer and trans* communities when it came to “gender and masculinity and trans* people... and what it means to be a trans* guy... Even in the questions people ask,

it's all readily apparent that they're making all these assumptions about how you want to be." As an example they shared how since their recent decision to start testosterone,

Some people assume that I use he and him pronouns now and start introducing me to people that way without even asking me... Or like one of my good friends who is a cis gay man but is also a drag queen and plays with gender in all these interesting ways is like, 'how does it feel to be trapped in the wrong body' and blah blah blah. Like that's not how I feel. Why do you make that assumption?

These scripts often placed doubts in the minds of students that impeded aspects of their self-determination. Jones described feeling "like an imposter sometimes" for using he/him/his pronouns, and considered reverting back to using they/them/theirs pronouns instead. "I think it all goes back to in general transphobia and a lot of legitimacy stuff. Like oh I feel like I'm putting on this masculinity that I don't really possess, but I do." Jones was talking about internalizing cissexism that told him that he wasn't a "real man" and thus his masculinity was not real either.

Questions of who is legitimate as a man or trans*man was something Charles also experienced the first time he was "in a room with a bunch of trans*men... I think I didn't feel man enough." This experience was before Charles self-identified as trans* himself, and gave him some pause as to whether he was trans* himself if he wasn't as masculine-appearing as the trans*men he was around. These constant pushes and pulls from within and outside of the trans* community meant that RJ needed to rely on themselves for affirmation. As they put it,

I get shit from both the cis community and my trans* community, so I need to make sure that I'm defining masculinity for myself and that I embody it in a way that's open, that's vulnerable, that's powerful in its own thing.

Aside from going within, both Kyle and Charles talked again about BBP being a space where they were able to see gender diverse people of color who embodied

masculinities and trans*ness in a variety of ways and made room for that variance. A few months after his BBP Leadership Retreat, Charles attended a conference where BBP members from across all the cohorts convened for the first time, which helped alleviate his previous feelings of not being “trans* enough.” Charles described “just seeing the vastness... of a larger spectrum of people of color who identify as masculine of center” as “powerful” and remembered meeting a particular individual as helping him shift how he conceptualized gender.

When Q says, ‘*he* makes me feel sexy, but *she* does not offend,’ I love that because I know Q at the time when we first met was going more for the androgyny, taking low doses of T. That was something interesting to me. I had never really heard that; I assumed you did or you didn’t, there was no grey area. But we live in the greys so it’s wonderful. So it was really nice to just see individuals who have had top surgery and individuals who have no desire to do that. You have people who are on hormones, who aren’t or are on some sort of in between of them. I remember meeting Oakley was so wonderful to see a feminine identified masculine of center human. That was something I had never really experienced before. It was just such a wonderful time. To see all of it from the perspective I now had after Brown Boi.

Even as Kyle identified himself as a man of transgender experience and thus not necessarily a non-binary identified person, he also considered his masculinity as more fluid than the binary would allow. He said,

My masculinity is dependent on the presence of femininity and how they balance in the same space. I guess it is more inclusive. The way I describe masculinity would be, freeing, supportive, forward thinking. I would describe masculinity as fluid, but generally it would be described as rigid and kind of hard I guess.

Kyle had a strong bond with another BBP member, someone he referred to as his brother, who also embodied a fluid masculinity. Conversations between them offered each of them the ability to seek and receive the affirmations they needed and did so without placing their masculinities in competition with each other or denigrating them.

We vibe off each other and he'll be like, 'Here's what my masculinity means to me, here's what my trans* masculinity means to me,' and I'll be 'Here's what my trans* masculinity means to me,' and he'll be like, 'You know what, that's cool.' We are affirming each other in the fact that even though his masculinity looks differently than mine, we can both coexist in the same space, and we can both claim masculinity for each other or for ourselves.

In the absence of community, many identified books and online communities such as Tumblr and YouTube as the spaces where they first learned about non-binary identities or escaped binary worlds. Eli shared how he "liked a lot of books that didn't involve humans, I guess because it's hard to associate with heavily binary humans when you don't really feel terribly binary in books." Bastian mentioned reading books by trans* authors, and specifically the influence they had not just in understanding his gender, but also his spiritual leanings.

I'm trying to think of books I read while I was coming out that really helped influence my gender presentation; my masculinity would be *Butch Is a Noun* (Bergman, 2006), *My Gender Workbook* by Kate Bornstein (1997), and *Transgender Warriors* by Leslie Fienberg (1997). I feel like they were very validating and the fact that they were all written by authors that were raised Jewish made me look more seriously into converting to Judaism.

The books that Bastian mentioned push against gender binaries each in its own way, by eliciting history, personal memoir, and even through humor, and allowed him to embrace a non-binary masculinity. Peter talked about online communities contributing to his unlearning gendered scripts that opened up his understanding of maleness. Prior to that,

When I first discovered trans*ness, I identified as non-binary because I didn't feel masculine. I felt androgynous and a lot of the figures I identified with were typical you know, people who were thin White male but androgynous like David Bowie and less known but still very wonderful Peter Murphy. People like that you know, glam rock, that whole aesthetic appealed to me a lot. I was like, oh I want to look like that, I want to be like that. But it took me a while to make the connection between... like for me to realize that I was male just because my experience was a lot different from all the trans* men that I'd seen for some reason.

Seth, for whom masculinity embodied both identity and expression, also found that cues of femininity on their body often meant getting misgendered and the misgendering affected their ability to be more fluid in their presentation. Ze described this issue as follows,

There are times where I want to be more masculine, and days where I want to be more feminine, and days where I don't really care, I just want to get to class on time. It's not something I spend too much time thinking about, but it is still something that I notice. Oftentimes I wonder to myself if I am very gender-fluid. Sometimes I feel like I could be more feminine just in my expression and I would feel fine with that. But then I realize I want to be called a guy no matter what I do... even if I wore a dress, I still would want to be called a guy.

Both Seth and Peter wanted to be seen as guys or men, and be able to express themselves in non-binary ways regardless. The ways that genderism had influenced the narratives of trans*ness that Peter was exposed to dictated that trans* men were masculine, and that his androgyny conflicted with trans* manhood and thus he surmised that could not be a trans* man. It was through Tumblr, a microblogging and social networking platform that Peter began to learn that “there is no such thing as someone who's the perfect paragon of masculinity, who has every single trait that is associated with masculinity.”

Seth and RJ found their campus' trans* groups to be the spaces where they got to meet and build community with non-binary individuals. When talking about the significance of such spaces where they have been able to meet gender diverse people, Seth said,

I feel like having interactions with gender non-conforming individuals has proven to be a far more valuable and validating experience than with either cis men or cis women, because I've realized that my experiences will never align to a cis man, and to try to achieve any sort of validation from one, especially at a pre-transitional stage, always tends to be a bit disheartening.

RJ helped facilitate the trans*-spectrum group on their campus which included “lots of trans*, gender non-binary folks, or genderfluid, or genderqueer” students. In discussing how leading that group has influenced them, RJ said that seeing the “spectrum” of masculinities in that group has “really spoken to me and has made me feel more confident in allowing myself to perform how I want to perform.”

Other times community and reprieve from rigid and binary masculinities came from mostly cis spaces that played with gender and masculinity in their own ways. For Demian, this space was theater in high school.

There’s something just about actors and they sort of like to push people’s limits. Everybody has to wear makeup... When it’s on a stage things are more acceptable. It’s like, oh its art, it’s over there. But then actors are still actors in their everyday life. It doesn’t stop when they leave the theater.

Seth found connection and examples of non-normative masculinities within metal subculture, where “not everyone... is the most masculine person.” Many of his “guy friends are pretty feminine,” and thus ze did not “really have to overexert my masculinity. I can kind of just be and they recognize me as male.” Being a part of this subculture afforded Seth with the confidence to keep their hair long as way of

telling myself that I don’t have to follow everyone else’s standards of masculinity... Having long hair despite having images of masculine guys normally having short hair. Being able to have that sense of security in your own identity, and have something that isn’t really normative.

Participants experienced pressures to conform to gendered binaries and masculine scripts both within cis and trans* worlds. These pressures and the misgendering led to many feeling silenced, unsafe, and at least partly pushed to making certain decisions around aesthetics and transition to address those forces. Participants sought affirmation of non-binary identities and fluid masculinities internally, as well as through books, faith,

communities of music, performance, and peers both offline and online. As Coffee Bean put it,

When I wake up in the morning and I look at myself in the mirror I like saying to myself you know what, my masculinity is like a little love poem to myself, where my masculinity is valid; it's a form of self-love, it's a form of self-preservation. And that's important, because for the longest time I wanted to annihilate that part of myself, because I thought that I wasn't really worth[y] of love. So I guess I think of my masculinity as being empowering for me, right, because of the fact that without my masculinity if I was just some cis sad woman or whatever then my life would be, like, I wouldn't know everything that I know now.

Summary

Trans*masculine college students' unique, transgressive, and deviating gender journeys allow them to disorient themselves to and disidentify with masculinities (Ahmed, 2006; Muñoz, 1999). The pathways they craft and traverse are informed by their many intersecting and salient identities and realities. This chapter focused on how these masculinities were embodied as explored through fashion, sexualities and relationships, (dis)ability, and non-binary gender conceptions. The final (trans*)masculine pathway is explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7

FINDINGS ON AUTHENTIC (TRANS*)MASCULINITIES

The previous two chapters explored the racialized pathway and the reoriented (trans*)masculine embodiments that trans*masculine college students took on to (re)define their gendered identities (see Appendix I). This chapter continues with the third and final pathway, authentic (trans*)masculinities, and its subpathways. Similar to those explored in chapter 5 and 6, authentic, intentional, and gentle (trans*)masculinities do not present themselves in an orderly fashion. They emerge at various points in the students' journeys, often occurring concurrently with each other and the other two pathways.

Authentic (Trans*)Masculinities

The experiences that many of the participants had and reflected on drew them to wanting to embody and redefine masculinities in ways that felt authentic to them, that did not involve performing restrictive, prescriptive, and harmful scripts just to be recognized as masculine and/or as men. Daniel needed to first realize that performance existed in his masculinity before he could begin to more authentically embody masculinity.

I think sort of I knew that I was trying pretty hard but I don't think I realized until talking about it how hard I was trying and how little I'm trying now but how much more comfortable I feel in that more authentic masculinity. It's less performative and more embodiments.

Authenticity meant different things to different students, but many talked about crafting their masculinities with intentionality and imbuing them with gentleness. The pathway to and through authenticity was not without challenge, particularly as participants had to contend with masculine socialization, some of which showed up through their interactions with others around them. This was the case for Jones who talked about how his friends began to “subtly” shift how they interacted with him in their efforts to demonstrate their support of Jones’ identity.

[One particular friend] fist bumps me and he doesn’t open doors for me anymore. People are like ... some of the guys are trying to be more actively inclusive of me. Greeting me more, but it’s weird. I don’t know if I or they know how to interact with each other because I am different. They’re making an effort on their part but I don’t know how to reciprocate. I guess it comes down to I don’t know how to be a guy the way they are guys. I think I will be on a learning curve for a long time... So I’m also thinking I want to carve out my own masculinity. I want to be my own brand of masculinity and at the same time I’m a social creature so I need to be a part of community and that requires a little bit of conformity. I think there’s a tension in between me trying to be myself and me needing to interact with other guys.

At times this tension that Jones talked about led to some choosing to give up something about themselves they considered important or integral. This was the case for James, who gave up interests he held because his perception of others’ ideas of manhood did not leave room for himself to continue being involved in them. Despite describing playing sports in high school as “a very big deal” for him as a competitive person, James admitted that he didn’t,

even play sports anymore, mainly because of the gender thing. Because I can’t play on the guys’ team... I mean I probably could at [my institution]. I could probably play on the intramural guys’ team and get in like the [student newspaper] or some bullshit like that, but definitely not worth it to me. And being on the girls’ team, not that I would feel bad, I’d feel worse about how people would look at the situation. Like I care more about how other people feel

about it than [how] I feel about it, which is stupid... I don't want to be the face of trans* inclusion [at my institution], because then it would become a thing.

James believed that he would not be able to just be one of the guys on a men's sports team and that others, perhaps partly out of a desire to reconcile their conceptions of him as a trans* person, would push him to have to be the trans* guy on the men's sports team. His desire to show up as authentically a man on his own terms conflicted with how he believed others would define authentically manhood. For Charles, trying to adhere to expectations in order to appease some of the tensions that Jones talked about led to different tensions showing up internally.

I was going to try and be as manly as humanly possible and it did not particularly work because I began to realize that I was not [manly], I didn't like myself. I didn't like how I was thinking, I didn't like how I was phrasing things and I realized that trying to get rid of my femininity was getting rid of part of myself.

Adhering to other people's or society's or even one's own normative ideas of what it means to be authentically masculine or a man meant Charles had to give up parts of himself, his femininity, in order to be recognized as masculine. He was able to retrieve these for himself once he took steps to feel comfortable in his body, such as binding, which "really helped me to embrace my femininity more because I didn't feel like I had to work so hard to secure my man passage."

Similarly, Jack talked about finding "comfort with masculinity" through "a sense of feeling comfortable in my body, because I finally transitioned." Thus, Jack found it "impossible to tease [masculinity] away from trans*ness," which in tandem have made him "a lot more confident." He described his masculinity as going "hand in hand" with his trans* identity and

Even though I would say male is my most primary identity now because the physical transition part has kind of ended for me now, I can never get rid of the trans* aspect of it, I am always influenced by my trans* experience, and by my femme experiences... it's like two side of a coin where it's like, 'Oh I can show you my masculinity, and now I can show you my trans*ness, and now I can show you my masculinity,' but it's still a coin. It's still one unit.

The intertwined nature of his masculinity and trans*ness meant that for Jack to be “more confident, a lot more comfortable with showing my masculinity, and also showing a [wider] variety of my masculinity,” including feeling “more comfortable with people reading me as gay,” he needed to feel safe as a trans* person. In his home state where he felt unsafe, being read as gay “bothered” him and made him “have to be a lot more up on the masculine gender norms if people were going to read me as a male who was straight, even though I don't identify as straight either.”

Mohammad looked forward to feeling comfortable in his body, the way Jack described, through transition. He often compared himself to another trans* guy in his life who had undergone transition and seeing “the transformation in his life ever since he transitioned.” Dismissing jealousy as underlying this comparison, Mohammad said that “a lot of my comparing myself to other trans* guys is I want to be as happy as *that* guy, soon.” Embracing his masculinity through his trans*ness had already made Charles “a happier person.” When he recently reconnected with an ex, she said to him, “I really like you as a boy.” Questioning what she meant by that, she told him that he appeared happier to her.

And I think that is probably the biggest influence – accepting my masculinity and my trans*ness – that has affected me is being happy. I don't particularly like waking up every morning and knowing that I have breasts, but I also acknowledge that's something that can be changed. So being happy with myself, not necessarily my physical self but again those things will change. Knowing that

embracing, again my masculinity via my trans*ness has led to a happier human that I am.

Even as Charles looked forward to physical transition, he was also able to craft his masculinity and sense of happiness in the meantime. Charles' ex offered a mirror that allowed him to see that he indeed was already happier than before, just by forging his own masculine path on his terms.

Others looked to the past to remember examples of themselves as embodying authenticity. Jay thought back to

When I was like 12, 13, I was like the happiest person on Earth. I didn't have the word for trans*, I knew I wasn't a girl. I didn't have the language, but I knew whatever and I was going to do whatever I wanted to do to be comfortable. What I was doing then worked for me then and you know I just was free... I'm trying to get back to that place, that 13 year old, that 12 year old that just didn't give a fuck and did their thing.

Jack and Mohammad talked about ways that play as children gave them room to be themselves. Jack talked about being in 5th grade and role playing with his friends who were all "tomboyish," and taking on masculine roles, such as Huck and Tom Sawyer from Huckleberry Finn. Learning that the world differentiated between masculinity and femininity came almost as a surprise to Mohammad, who just assumed that everyone felt the way he did about his gender. He talked about as a child "hanging out with my brothers, hanging out with the guys, playing basketball, skateboarding, and gender wasn't really a problem then." Bastian also felt sort of matter-of-fact about his gender as a child. Growing up Catholic, he remembered a conversation with his mother.

I told her quite explicitly that I was going to be a priest when I grew up and she said, but only boys can be priests and I went, I know... At the time when I was saying it I felt like I was just stating facts. I know that my mom did not interpret it like that. It felt just kind of like I was saying how things were...

The ways that Jay, Mohammad, Jack, and Bastian described their relationships with their genders as children, as feeling more authentic to them then, as just “stating facts,” illuminates how much gender socialization intensifies with age. The stories they shared were all from pre-puberty times, identifying puberty or the onset of it as a time when families and society begin to push the gender binary more adamantly and thus it becomes inescapable. Many of their stories also involved play, which may also indicate that the people around them did not worry as much about essentializing their genders, if they saw these “transgressions” as merely fun and games.

Moving from childhood to adulthood, peers played a major role for many participants trying to reground themselves in their genders. Mohammad talked about the significance of meeting a gender diverse group of masculine of center people of color through his participation in BBP as affirming and “a life changing experience.” BBP helped him define masculinity by affirming that,

Bois cry too, right? There was a lot of crying during [BBP] from everybody, and to be able to really dig deep into ourselves and... It's the first time that I really dug into myself and I grabbed... I took hold of that masculinity that's inside of me, and I literally like understood it for the first time, what it was. I understood the feelings that I was feeling... It was the first time I came to peace with it and didn't feel ashamed of it, and was able to be like, 'I feel this way, and so do a lot of these people in this room with me. We might feel it in different ways, but it's okay.' Because for a long time I didn't think it was okay, and I thought something was wrong with me. It defined masculinity for me in the sense of this is who I am... like it's okay... to be a masculine person who's sensitive, but is also in touch with their feminine side, whatever that is.

In addition to being able to “all like express ourselves [as masculine] without having the fear of someone saying transphobic things,” it was meeting “masculine of center women and like trans* guys who had their shit together” that allowed him to shed internalized heterosexist and cissexist messages of destined homelessness and

undesirability. Mohammad said the experience helped him envision himself “as somebody in the future. I see myself as a father. I see myself as me.” This ultimately provided him with the confidence to come out to his parents as trans*, and reconnect to his father’s definition of masculinity.

Masculinity is not a thing you can put in a box and wrap up in a bowtie. Masculinity is kind of what my dad says, ‘Be good to others, protect your family, be true to yourself, and be authentic.’ Okay, that’s what it is, be authentic.

Similar to Mohammad, Daniel also sought and found validation from others like him, in his case, other trans* men. As his comfort with himself grew, and he was able to find validation internally, he noticed how his social networks became more and more gender diverse.

I went through a period of time where I was really only interested in being friends with other trans* men... I think that was the finding community... we’re sort of looking at each other for a certain type of validation and then once I didn’t feel the need to be validated by anyone else I was like, okay I can have these deep meaningful friendships and relationships with women and not feel any less masculine for that... But actually sort of allowing myself to have meaningful relationships with people that identify as feminine.

Feeling like he did not have to validate himself with his best friend, allowed James to show up more authentically with him and even “delve into my past,” which he did not do with others, “because then it comes with the whole, ‘are you really trans* then?’” James was referring to being able to talk about things like “how much easier it was when I was a girl dating guys” as something he could only share with this one person. Seth on the other hand believed that it was his choices to be “more honest” that allowed him to “have stronger bonds with people, because they appreciate when you are honest with them.” Ze believed that revealing his trans* identity to others made people “almost... more invested in you than they would otherwise be.” Thus Seth and James

had different experiences and perspectives on trusting others around their gendered realities, with Seth building bonds with others through trusting revelations, while James established bonds first before opening up to his best friend.

Others talked about femininity within masculinity as being a part of their understanding of what it meant for them to be masculine authentically. Bastian, who was “always kind of obsessed with Spiderman when I was really little,” shared that part of relating to that character was because he saw Spiderman “as kind of a feminine appearing character, but he was clearly a guy and he was very into learning and science, and he’s also a teacher in some of the comics.” As a teacher himself, seeing all of those characteristics embodied together gave Bastian a visual model of authentic masculinity that included femininity.

For others, these visual models of authentic masculinity that either included femininity or did not embody hyper masculinity came in the form of other masculine people, including cisgender men. Demian talked about their friends in theater “who are out there and like breaking barriers and saying ‘oh, I can be this and still be this and that’s okay.’ Or like anything that seemed like it conflicted but they were like, no it’s okay.” These examples translated for Demian to shift masculinity from “seeming like something that was like ‘no it’s not for you, it’s something else and it has to be this thing’ and realizing that it could be molded.” For Charles, it was his stepfather who “was in the navy, but cries watching Oprah” that allowed masculinity and crying to coexist rather than conflict.

As Jay socialized with more and more cisgender men as a man, he was able to see the “diversity among [them] and how they demonstrate their masculinity.” Having the “insider” track gave Jay insight as “guys think they can just say whatever to” other men, whereas they “put on some type of performance when they’re dealing with feminine folks and women.” In a way, this was actualizing what Jay had learned from his gender and sexuality studies classes, seeing for example a White gay cis friend of his negotiate gender identity, expectations and presentation for himself.

I knew that [theoretically] but to hear about it and not just him but other guys too. Like I just never heard guys talk about gender, you know what I mean? And masculinity and what not, how that has influenced them and how they’re figuring out their own stuff, how they fit, how they don’t fit and to you know certain dominant patterns and everything.

Jay talked about learning that cisgender guys did think and talk about gender as the way they tried to figure out what fit, meaning what was authentic to them. Perhaps because Daniel had spent so much of his life already thinking and talking about gender, he defined being authentic with his masculinity as “sort of allowing myself to not think about it so much and to just live it.” This was in line with him constructing authenticity as “getting out of your head and more into your body.” He described this distinction as also being the difference for him between a boy and a man.

It’s definitely rooted in for a long time thinking is this how a man walks, is this how a man does this? It’s like does a man or a male person when they put their arm around somebody is it on the shoulders, is it below that, like where does it go? Does it matter if we’re holding hands in a sort of horizontal way, like which hand is on top? All of those questions and that’s so in the head related to the body. Whereas most recently it’s been, does that feel good? It does feel good, great awesome. Do I feel sort of whole in this experience? Yes I do, great. So I almost think that man is a gender that’s less interested in gender almost.

Daniel also differentiated between two ways of thinking about gender. Thinking about gender in terms of how one performs it, such as the examples above, he associated with boyhood. What he associated with manhood was thinking in terms of being thoughtful and being intentional about one's embodiment of masculinity rather than its performance. Daniel talked about striking this balance between authenticity and intentionality as someone who over time learned to acknowledge his privilege and not hide behind his marginal identities.

I think I, for a long time hid behind queerness and not talked about masculinity and to sort of be like okay I'm a queer dude and I don't have to think about the way that I show up in that space. Because I don't know, I have this sort of idea that queerness makes me non-threatening or makes me some other person. But now it feels good to be authentically masculine, but to also to be intentionally thinking about it at the same time. To think about the implications and stuff.

Often, trans*masculine college students talked about needing to feel safe in their surroundings and comfortable with their bodies as precursors to defining their authentic masculinities. Authenticity came with varying senses of happiness, joy, peace with self, and freedom, which a few recollected from their childhoods. With increasing ability to be authentic, also came the ability to embrace aspects of their femininities.

Intentional (Trans*)Masculinities

Authenticity, both the ability to be authentic and the desire to, was tied to many of the participants wanting to craft masculinities with intention. Much of these intentions revolved around acknowledging the privileges that they were accruing as masculine people and/or men. The privilege that most participants named as something they wished to be aware of was space, both literally and figuratively. Eli spoke of space as understanding his role in certain conversations.

I try not to intrude on conversations that are specifically about women or femininity. Because I feel like it's not my place... it's my place to listen. I feel like a large part of that is fighting the toxicity of masculinity. And trying to redefine what it means in terms of respecting femininity and other such things.

During their interview together, Peter quickly agreed, as he believed that women should be leading discussions that are about women, and added,

Usually when I jump into the conversation it's me defending trans* women against cis women who are acting a little bit TERF-y [acronym for Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminists] and maybe they don't realize they are... I try to educate them; these are the struggles trans* women go through; trans* women do not have male privilege; they suffer transmisogyny; they suffer all of these things that are like, they suffer the intersection of transphobia and misogyny not just misogyny... I know it's not exactly my place to speak for them but I feel like it's better than just letting people have their bad opinions.

Thus for Peter, being intentional in these spaces meant being aware not just of how much he spoke, but also when and utilizing his vocal space for advocacy. Earl also talked about making conscious decisions to not speak as his way to not take up space in the classroom. He said, "If I knew the answers and stuff, I didn't want to answer it. Or if I knew how to do something I didn't want to say that I knew how to do it."

Kyle described how the concept of space in terms of voice changed for him as his identity did. He contrasted how he used to think about the space he would take up in conversation as a "masculine-of-center woman" versus how he thinks about it now. Kyle was aware of how misogyny and sexism used to operate to silence him, and thus he resisted that silencing by speaking more. When they later operated to elevate his voice instead, he shifted his resistance against misogyny and sexism by choosing to speak less. He credited part of his learnings about space to a romantic partner in college during a time when he was first beginning to express his masculinity who affirmed and "reinforced my masculinity." There would be crucial moments when she would ask him

questions like, “but you’re a guy, so like what does that even mean?” These questions would force him to think about himself “being able to take up space, me having to realize that, and because I take up space, having to manage that.”

For Charles these shifts showed up in the ways language had different impact coming from him as a masculine person, and wanting to be mindful of that. As an example, he talked how amongst his friends he used to say things like,

‘oh my god you’re being such a bitch,’ right, and talking to my friends that way. It’s clearly banter-y and that’s just our way of speaking, but I realize now when I say the word ‘bitch’ in public to anyone, joking or not, my male presence makes it different and I have to be really mindful of my presence and how I say things because I don’t want to be *that* guy.

Charles also talked about taking up literal physical space. Prior to self-identifying as a trans* man, Charles had secured a job at his campus’ women’s resource center. Over the summer,

My trans*ness exited the closet and I came back and I connected with my boss at the time and I spoke with them. ‘Just so you know I now go by Charles, I identify as male. If that changes my employment status that is totally valid and fine.’ But they were super wonderful and they allowed me to have space in their space and I in turn was very mindful of the space I took up with all of them.

The experience Charles had feeling welcomed in the women’s resource center allowed him to practice intentionality both in the realm of space-taking, but also in being able to “still... advocate for women.” Coffee Bean struggled with figuring out their role as a trans*masculine person in a women’s organization, namely the sorority they had joined. They wanted to figure out how to advocate for trans* women and center trans*feminine individuals in the conversation about trans* inclusion in their sorority rather than their own narrative.

Am I even supposed to take up this space? Right? Like we live in a deeply misogynistic world. So is it right for me to like center the conversation when we talk about trans* people on masculinity, right? Instead of talking about how can we include trans*feminine people and trans* women into that organization.

Coffee Bean was struggling to figure out how to approach conversations on gender, privilege, and trans* identity. Similarly, as part of a team of three instructors with a cisgender man and a cisgender woman, Blake was trying to navigate their “positionality in regards to sexism” in a new way as a non-binary trans*masculine person. They looked “for resources and realized that there’s nothing out there” to help them prepare to co-teach this module on sexism. They took it upon themselves to do some personal reflection, and connected with “another non-binary female-assigned-at-birth person” to conduct “a dialogue called exploring sexism and non-binary trans*masculinities” with a group of non-binary identified individuals.

Despite complicating binary notions of privilege, many students understood that they did experience privilege as masculine people and wished to maintain their awareness of it. Mohammad named masculinity as holding a “very privileged position” and brought up not “having to deal with the male gaze... going outside and having creepy guys whistle at me or just tell me to smile” as one of the ways he experienced that privilege. Coffee Bean described wanting their masculinity to be “accountable... ethical... without misogyny... just fun and carefree like my polka dot bowtie.” They described wanting “to have my cake and eat it too” and by that they meant,

I want to have the bowties and suspenders and have the flat chest and have all this other stuff. I want all of that. There’s still a part of me that still wants to be Humphrey Bogart in Casablanca. But I want to do all of that without the cloying paternalism, the ‘I know better for you, Ilsa, about what you want so I’m going to send you on that plane even though you don’t know what the fuck you want, ’cause I’m a man and I know better than you.’

Eli described this paternalism as having a “savior complex... like, oh I’m masculine now, now I have to help everyone,” something he actively wanted to avoid. Peter called out men who consider themselves feminists, but “they just call themselves that to get brownie points,” and would talk over women as a way he saw that “savior complex” demonstrated. Thus even when intending to show up as feminists or in a helping fashion, hegemonic masculinity’s privileging of the masculine perspective has the ability to entitle men and/or masculine people to leadership and voice. Intentionality is needed in order to retrain one’s self “to not be masculine in the way that I was taught” as Charles put it, and to remember that “that in itself changes every day.” Here Charles was referencing how privilege shifts for him as his masculinity and/or how his masculinity/gender are read shift. Thus his “retraining” must also adapt to address new ways that hegemonic masculinity and masculine privilege enters his life and consciousness.

The effort this kind of intentionality necessitates was not lost on Jones. In reflecting on how much he thought about gender and masculinity, he remarked

Other people don’t worry about stuff like that, but I do so that means I’m thinking a lot about stuff. Taking some of my brain space. That could be an advantage and a disadvantage. It’s good I have the ability to think about these things, but at the same time I should be worrying about studying and everything else that everyone else is thinking about. It just raises my anxiety level a little bit.

Jones was keenly aware that his perspective as a trans*masculine person gave him important and unique insight into gender and privilege, allowing him to be intentional about his presence. However, he was just as aware of the emotional and academic toll that it took to exert this kind of effort in contexts, such as higher education institutions, where the default sustains patriarchy, genderism, and hegemonic masculinity.

Self-awareness, while a necessary precursor, is not always enough to push trans*masculine students to want to disrupt traditional masculine scripts. James, for example, admitted that “it’s bad that I’m self-aware enough to notice that I don’t do anything about it.” In high school, his involvement in a multitude of extracurriculars and being “conventionally pretty” provided him with attention that he enjoyed. Part of that attention was also that his high school “was a small school, everyone was White, and I was the Black Asian Native American White girl. So I didn’t even look like everyone, I wasn’t conventional... but a foreign thing in White suburbia.” For James, it was almost easier to accept this exoticization of the racialized ways he stood out in high school than to resist it in the overwhelmingly predominantly White context of his school. As he came to terms with his masculinity, the messages he had received from others that he was “pretty,” were slowly internalized.

People telling me I’m attractive and actually feeling attractive I think has pushed me to kind of act out with it. Like, hell yeah, this is fucking nice. But then maybe taking it too far and that’s why I’m an asshole. I’m realizing that, I could dial it back, but I’m kind of like basking in this moment of everything lining up more than it has been.

As someone who continued to feel discomfort with his physicality, James accepted accolades on his looks as a masculine person. He did not want to risk losing the parts “of everything lining up” by challenging his own masculinity, let alone that of others. Alternatively, Jack had both expressed comfort with his body and feeling affirmed as a masculine person by his fraternity brothers. Unconcerned with getting misgendered by them, he leveraged the bonds that he had with these men and put in the effort to speak up about misogyny and sexism with his brothers.

In a fraternity everything is about brotherhood, and the masculinity that plays out there is using that as a bonding space... There are people who are football players all the way to computer nerds in my frat, and so having that kind of diversity in the fraternity, we are putting all that aside because we are brothers. That's the kind of masculinity that's going on there. Brotherhood is more important and more sacred than anything else. Which is a great avenue for me being like, 'hey guys, we shouldn't talk about women like that.' Then they're like, 'oh, ok.' They wouldn't necessarily respect that comment from anyone else but because I'm in the fraternity I have this access.

Himself "being a kind of masculine person who physically appears to be the norm... I follow the secondary sex characteristics of what cis men tend to have," Jack chose instead to break norms,

In terms of emotional norms and how I build relationships... I don't think that masculinity needs to be in this box of men who are stoic and constantly in competition with each other. That's not something I am interested in – ever. I really try to push masculinity as being something that can be very sensitive, can be very emotional, can be very humble. A lot of that really ties into my religion because I'm Buddhist, so I really pull in a lot of compassion teachings and try to interact with people from that framework.

Jack looked towards his faith as a guide for him to engage others with compassion, sensitivity and humility, traits he believed challenged what it meant to interact with others as a masculine person. To maintain his humility, Kyle talked about a group of people with whom he intentionally built relationships. He admonished trans*men "who are like, 'I would never hang out with another trans* guy who doesn't pass,' or you know, who people 'can tell.'" Instead, he explained,

I feel I gravitate towards trans* men who are earlier in their transition because it reminds, it keeps me humble, it keeps me able to not forget that I had this experience too. I've forgotten so much about the past year or two. I don't even think about some of this shit anymore. Then it keeps me, it reminds me, ok just cause I'm here doesn't mean everyone's here. So I have to make room and remind myself that it's not that easy [to resist traditional masculinity].

Charles and Jay expressed gratitude for the ways and the people around whom they were raised. In fact, Charles stated that “weirdly enough, I’ve now come to accept... me having been born a girl and having the really strong female influences from my mother and grandmother.” Similarly, Jay believed that “growing up around a lot of women and listening to them and learning from them... cut out a lot of bullshit I guess for me.” These expressions of thankfulness push back against normative trans* narratives dictating that trans* individuals despise the gender they were assigned at birth, that they were “born in the wrong body,” and that they want nothing to do with their pasts. Instead, Charles and Jay are emblematic of many who are finding their journeys and perspectives as trans* people have afforded them with unique gifts and perspectives of the world that they continue to intentionally use to shape their movements, identities, and worldviews.

Although he believed that “all sort of masculine people have a journey with masculinity,” Daniel also believed that “specifically trans*masculine people are more in tune with that journey, or I would hope so.” Thus, having the perspective of a trans* person alone was not enough for Daniel to “inhabit different masculinities.” He reflected on his own journey and how,

For a long time, I didn’t think about that. I was like, this is what a man does, whatever. I’m going to do these things because that’s what masculine people do and then sort of transitioned into it doesn’t matter because I’m queer and then realized it actually does still matter and I need to think about it more. And I think that we, myself included often fall into the two traps of this is what a man does so I’m going to do that and not being intentional about it and then the trap of okay but I’m trans or I’m queer so I don’t have to think about that stuff because I’m a different type of man. Which are both sort of avoidance tactics, to actually thinking about masculinity.

Thus trans*ness and queerness have the potential to be “intentionally disruptive,” which Daniel described as “you want me to do this this way, and I’m actually going to figure out if that works for me and if it doesn’t, I’m not going to do that.” What he identified as helping him come to intentionality through his queerness and trans*ness included his cultural studies classes, his involvement with the central social justice organization on campus, and his relationship with a staff member – a cisgender woman of color – in the cultural center. These were relationships and spaces of resistance within the campus that Daniel actively chose to engage in and with, that taught him how to leverage his privileges and imbued his masculinity with intentionality. As a result of learning to be intentional with masculinity, Daniel also learned about how to be intentional in other arenas in his life, such as in crafting his career.

We think that masculinity just happens and it doesn’t just happen. Then realizing all of the others things especially within a career path that we think of as just happening. I came to [my institution] as a photo major and then I was like no, because I thought it was just going to happen. I was good at photography and this is what I should do because it just happened. Then started to realize I had to construct a life for myself [and learning to be more intentional] has allowed me to do that in so many different spaces.

Daniel’s transfer of intentionality from the realm of identity into his career path is significant in that it pushes against what some trans*masculine students identified as an aspect of dominant masculinity. Bastian in particular talked about how he believed men like his father just followed expected career paths without much thought, without much intention, and without taking their own desires into consideration. They just took on what appeared in front of them. Similarly, Kyle talked about how his masculinity gave him agency to “take more initiative to make plans” rather than accept things as they came. He said,

I feel like I can negotiate more what I want out of my life because of how I think of my trans* masculinity. I think, ‘You know, I actually have a choice in what I want to do,’ and I didn’t necessarily believe that before. So then I start actually acting on things, I think, ‘You know, I want that.’ And if I want it, then I’m going to go get it, and if I don’t get it then it wasn’t meant for me, but if I do, then yay! I tried.

Embracing his masculinity meant approaching it with intentionality and taking initiative in his life to change what he could. Kyle also talked about discarding defeatism if something did not go his way (“then it wasn’t meant for me”). Similarly, Charles talked about how he was being intentional about reframing perfection and accepting that not all endeavors lead to achieving your goals, but that there can be lessons to gain there as well. In redefining perfection for himself, he said,

Being imperfect can be perfect if I learn from it. If I take those experiences and implement them in a positive way and not let it ruin my day. Not let it undermine me and make me feel less than. I’m still learning. I’m still growing... I need to be okay to try and to fail. Well that didn’t work, let’s try it this way now. And then okay that way didn’t work either. And to not let myself beat myself up because I’m not there yet.

Mohammad experienced this as a student leader with his institution’s Muslim Student Association (MSA) where he challenged the need to hold “ridiculous segregated meetings [where] the sisters sit in the back [and] the brothers sit in the front.” As president he wanted the MSA to “talk about social issues that are happening to our people... and also I wanted to combat sexism.” He talked about a time when he helped organize an all-female panel called “women in Islam,” which did not end up happening when all the women panelists ended up canceling. Instead, the Imam was brought in to speak, and when Mohammad got up to introduce him, “people were angry that a ‘female’ was speaking in front of an audience of both men and women and especially men.”

This experience had Mohammad make a promise to himself that “I’m going to do everything in my power to combat this bullshit traditional men-first, women-last kind of mentality in the Muslim community.” He believed more men needed to take a stand against the manifestations of sexism in Muslim communities and that “I’m going to be way more respected as a cisgender passing guy.” Jay also felt it was his responsibility to speak up “when someone says something really out of line,” despite the resistance he would receive.

It can be awkward. Like with the folks in my family, some of the people in my family they say, ‘Oh, that’s because you’re transgender,’ and it’s like, ‘No dude. It’s because that’s fucked up, that’s why I said something.’ But it can be awkward. I just go by safety first. As long as I’m safe, I’ll say something. I feel like most people should abide by that rule like say some shit or don’t, your silence is complicity.

Gabriel was also not interested in being complicit or as he put it, to “assimilate.” He also acknowledged that there were decades of socialization ahead of him, and that he could “see myself just being like a 50-year-old White guy, and I don’t want to *just* be that.” He wanted to continue to be intentional and to think about how he was showing up in the world. Daniel wanted to remind himself in the future to “keep thinking more, you’re not there yet... you’ll never be there.” In a similar vein, Mohammad’s advice to himself was to “slow down” and to remember that “you don’t know everything.” These messages to themselves in the future were recognitions that unintentionality was like standing still on a moving pathway, a common analogy drawn in social justice education to highlight that oppression and injustice need only complicity and lack of resistance in order to continue operating. Instead, these students were owning their pathways, crafting them, and recrafting them. Even as he also continued to exert effort in these ways, Kyle

wanted to remind himself to “laugh a little and enjoy it, ‘cause it can be whatever you want it to be.”

Students were beginning to craft intentional (trans*)masculinities as it related to vocal and physical space, language, and advocacy for and with (trans*)women. Several talked about intentionality in their masculinities being a constant practice, one that needed reevaluating as others’ perceptions of them and their presentations shifted. Trans*masculine students’ keen awareness of the complex ways they experienced privilege and respect as masculine people and/or men pushed them to want to maintain this intentional way of being masculine without sacrificing their own self of authenticity.

Gentle (Trans*)Masculinities.

These intentional approaches to masculinities were in balance and conjunction with gentle (trans*)masculinities. Intentional (trans*)masculinities involved a lot of active resistance against the status quo and the hegemonic scripts these students were expected to adopt. Coffee Bean could easily articulate “what I *don’t* want my masculinity to be,” which reflected the ways they were harmed and excluded by enactments of masculinity “and how I’m still healing from a lot of that.” Charles wanted to make sure that his brothers knew that his masculine identity did not mean that

All of a sudden I’m going to beat the shit out of them and give them wedgies and do all those weird things that brothers do to each other that I don’t know, because I wasn’t a brother for most of my life.

Crafting masculinities that were authentic to them was not just about *undoing*, but also about *redoing* gender on their terms. For many, this meant taking the lessons they had learned across their lifetimes to imbue masculinity with gentleness. Thus gentle

(trans*)masculinities was how trans*masculine college students wanted to show up and redo gender. Earl saw his masculinity as,

Being different from cis guys in that I was raised and socialized as female. I'm happy for that, I feel like that offers me insight and guidance on things I do and things that I don't do... For me when I was younger there was a lot of overcompensating for masculinity. I feel like over time I was kind of like you don't have to do that anymore. You don't have to be hard, you don't have to be stoic, you don't have to be that dude, that stereotypical dude and it's okay to use what you learn and experience from being raised and conditioned as female to let that influence what masculinity is or how it looks to you or presents through you.

Daniel similarly shifted how he understood what masculinity was over time, and distinguished them as boy masculinity and man masculinity. For him boy masculinity is "this really constructed hyper masculinity and it's got to be aggressive and I have to say dumb shit about women." As he began to "conceptualize what it means to be a man" for himself, Daniel described man masculinity "as a gentler, more sensitive masculinity."

Mohammad, who often compared himself to cis men remarked that "we have the same level of competitiveness, I guess... I'm just a little bit softer." This softness allowed Charles to acknowledge that "I'm more gentle with not only others, but [also] with myself." Being gentle with himself allowed Charles to accept himself. He stated,

It's okay to be vulnerable, whatever vulnerable means. Whether it's crying and being emotionally vulnerable or being physically vulnerable and allowing myself to be more comfortable with my body and the skin that I'm in that I can't not be in.

Being "gentler" and more "compassionate" with themselves led to Coffee Bean liking themselves more and "just knowing that my desires, particularly about my body, how I want to look, they're not bad, they're not deviant, they're not like something is wrong with me. They're just me." Having spent "twenty years feeling miserable with myself because of this body, because of what other people told me," through

vulnerability and compassion, Coffee Bean rewrote their masculinity into “a little love poem to myself.”

RJ believed that “vulnerability has its place in masculinity, and I think it should be at its center.” RJ’s demand that masculinity center vulnerability stood in disidentified opposition to the ideas that masculine people “have to be strong, and you can’t really show emotion all the time.” Kyle relished the “freedom for even the most built guy in the gym to cry with his friends or his partner, or his parents, or whatever” that his masculinity offered him and others. For him being vulnerable meant being able to “watch ‘chick flicks’... [or] have conversations about things that he is dealing with,” and reframed talking about feelings as “courageous” and “not weak.” He thought back to meeting his mentor, “the first Black trans* man that I ever met,” with whom he,

...had really in depth conversations about walking down the streets and guys don’t want to smile at each other, they don’t want to say hi to each other... and how much that hurts not being able to make that connection and wanting to make that connection, even if we don’t know each other to be able to acknowledge the fact that we’re here and we’re going through things... We had those types of conversations... I was like, ‘We can talk like this? This is tight!’

Having resisted trying “to fit into this really restrictive feminine role,” Jones was not interested in replacing that with an equally restrictive masculine one, but instead to give himself “the freedom to move the way I’ve always wanted to move, just the freedom to be.” Knowing himself as,

not a hypermasculine kind of person... I’ve learned to embrace my feminine features and feminine qualities because that makes me... more whole and well rounded. So I hold onto my nurturing side and try to be gentler.... So I’m trying to embrace those things and not erase them or just abandon those things for masculinity.

Mohammad also talked about holding onto aspects of him that were gendered as feminine. However, he was also interested in redefining or regendering these aspects. “I have a sensitive side, so I have a lot of femininity. But I also don’t think that those are two different binaries. I think they’re interchangeable a lot of times for everybody.” Thus Mohammad was also challenging that sensitivity was inherently a feminine trait. As a Buddhist, people such as the Dalai Lama and the philosopher Thich Nhat Hahn helped Jack reframe what is or is not a feminine or masculine trait, as “the two of them really embody the kind of masculinity that’s about compassion, and that’s really what my spiritual belief is, and what I want to embody, period.”

What was “nice to see” and experience for Kyle was learning about the spectrum of ways that masculinity could be from Cole, the executive director of BBP, who “as a woman... was able to teach me more about my masculinity than a lot of the men earlier in my life could... and the fact that she did so from a place of love was important.” Particularly as a Black man, it was important for Kyle to experience what redemptive and transformative love could look like from another Black masculine-of-center person. Seeing Cole model a caring and supportive masculinity taught Kyle that love “could be a part of masculinity.” Additionally, another woman in his life helped him renegotiate how he understood masculinity and himself in it. “Basically she told me to stop the back talk, stop the negative talk, stop talking myself down and talking my masculinity down because it’s there. I don’t have to doubt that.” Masculinity could be loving, affirming, and supportive, and Kyle did not have to downplay it in order to be those things.

Gentle masculinity was not about being weak or powerless. Charles understood his masculinity by watching elephants and how they “can paint pictures and all these types of things and can pick up something very delicately but at the same time they can railroad it down.” Watching these gentle giants reminded Charles that strength in masculinity also involved “how you choose to use it.” Aside from people and animals, different contexts could also allow for gentle masculinity to emerge. Earl, who had previously described the barber shop as a place where he wasn’t his “best masculine self,” also reflected on how it allowed for Black men to interact in ways with each other that they would not outside of that space.

Where there’s this Black man that his job is to take care of other Black men, you know what I’m saying? Basically make us pretty and care for us in this very, just the whole act is very gentle and beautiful, touching your face and moving in a way that like outside of that context would be pretty unacceptable but in that context is acceptable and beautiful for that moment.

Being able to witness gentleness and touch among Black men in the barber shop allowed Earl to visualize gentle Black masculinity. Although, he did not always see this type of masculinity in other predominantly cis het Black spaces and this operated more as an exception for Earl, exceptions can push against norms and eventually shift them. This encouraged Charles to “be the anomaly that will hopefully one day be the norm as opposed to the not norm.”

Part of gentleness and vulnerability for RJ also involved self-preservation. When trying to capture their masculinity in a word or short phrase, RJ stated “my trans*masculinity is self-care... self-care and survival.” For Kyle this translated to “not forget[ting] about myself in these larger movements, while also supporting [and advocating for] other people as well.” This meant learning how to be “a lot more

supportive in healthier ways, not overexerting myself because I know that I can't do everything, which is funny because I guess the man is supposed to do everything.” Having internalized that he deserved “healthy living [and] care” he talked about being communicative and transparent about his capacity with others so that he can balance taking care of himself with being there for others. This is the type of gentler masculinity that for Daniel is “interested in negotiation” and allows for masculine individuals to be more grounded in themselves, more embodied rather than performative.

Summary

This final chapter discussing the findings of the study focused on presenting the third of the (trans*)masculine pathways. Continuing to be informed by their many intersecting and salient identities and realities, authentic (trans*)masculinities incorporated approaching masculinities with both intention and gentleness. A discussion and implications of all findings are explored in the next and final chapter.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

This dissertation study investigated trans*masculine college students' conceptualizations and definitions of masculinity, including how their various intersecting identities informed these for them. An exhaustive literature review and unique conceptual framework guided the study, which was a queerly intentional phenomenological research project. Through individual and dual interviews, a diverse participant pool unveiled a slew of disidentified and reoriented (trans*)masculine pathways that demonstrated their abilities to shift the conversation on and practice of masculinity. In a year that saw toxic and hegemonic masculinity unleash itself unapologetically and with little if any accountability on trans*women, Black people of all genders, all types and races of women, schools and places of worship (Chemaly, 2015; Devega, 2015; Tourjee, 2015), trans*masculine students are creating and offering life-saving alternatives, and demanding gender liberation. This chapter, as the concluding chapter of the dissertation, offers some of the conceptual, methodological, scholarly, and practical implications of what these students have gifted us.

Discussion

Trans*masculine college students notice and conceptualize masculinity in particularly nuanced ways. Their perspectives are informed by their lived experiences as

trans* individuals, with trans* identity being embodied and understood in many different ways. As individuals existing in a patriarchal world, they are aware of and susceptible to the influences of hegemonic masculinity and internalized dominance, and at times knowingly adopt certain dominant traits as a survival skill and/or assimilation technique. This in itself provides evidence that gender socialization is not something that ends with the advent of adolescence or even adulthood, but that it is continuously in play throughout individuals' lives. The pathways upon which trans*masculine college students construct and reconstruct trans*masculinities are racialized, embodied and reoriented, and seek authenticity in intentional and gentle ways. Although these pathways are the constructions of trans*masculine people and thus influenced by their particular gendered conceptions and experiences, they exist as gender possibilities for a variety of masculine people and men. This is represented by the use of parentheses when describing (trans*)masculine pathways, to both not dismiss the role of trans*ness in students' conceptions of masculinity, as well as insinuate the potentials that the pathways hold for others.

The study also further illuminated gender's relational nature, rather than as something that is solely self-determined. Specifically for this study, masculinity was often discussed as something that is imposed, developed, accepted, and put upon by others, predominantly by cisgender others. Peter, who identifies as male and trans but not masculine, chose to participate in a study to discuss masculinity as it is something that is often imposed on him or assumed about him, with his maleness being rejected when he does not express or perform masculinity. James relied heavily on others, both in

person and through social media, for social cues on masculinity and for affirmation and acceptance. His desire to be seen as attractive by women – as well as for other men to see that women find him attractive – also showcased the relation between masculinity and heterosexuality, the latter reinforcing the former. This offers further understanding of the concept of heterogenderism (Nicolazzo, 2015).

The relational nature of gender also means that privilege associated with gender is at least partially dependent on others' perceptions of one's closeness to or distance from masculinity, and what others impose or allow through their actions and behaviors with an individual. Groups that participants brought up as particularly influential in these impositions and developments included parents (particularly fathers), society as a whole, women (particularly romantic partners, as well as masculine of center women like Cole and Audre Lorde as role models), trans* men (both in restrictive and liberatory ways), and cisgender faculty, staff, and peers on campus. In the case of the latter some students reflected on cisgender individuals on campus that provided relief from feeling gender-policed, such as the staff at the women's center for Charles, whereas others like Blake shared being misgendered even by those they expected to be affirmed such as the faculty in their social justice education program. These relational gendered perceptions by others are further mediated by one's real or perceived sexuality, age, size (as discussed by Stephen and Peter), as well as race (as discussed by Jones and Kyle). Thus, privilege associated with gender, whether that is male privilege or cisgender privilege, cannot be assumed to be static and is dependent on an array of contextual influences. Additionally, the absence of (cisgender) men does not necessarily mean that hegemonic masculinity

and male privilege are not present and active. For example, the pressure Jones felt to “repress” his gender identity and learn what it meant to be a woman on an all-women’s floor in a residence hall spoke to how crucial the gender binary is to maintaining hegemonic masculinity and vice versa.

Part of the motivation for some students to participate in the study was to reflect on the shifting perceptions of women of their masculinity. Jack’s reflections, for example, were about being seen as dangerous by women the more he was read as masculine. Ahmed (2006) would describe this *shift* in perception as an externally imposed *reorientation* towards gender. This shift provided participants like Jack opportunities to consider their masculinities and presence in a different way than cisgender men might, who do not knowingly experience these shifts. Thus the thrill that can come with being seen as masculine can come with certain losses, such as connection to women. The excitement of being seen as “one of the boys,” can also be mitigated by the realization that there is a culture of silence that takes away one’s ability to object to men’s violence and misogyny (Kimmel, 2008). Several participants, including Bastian and Earl, reflected on times when silence overshadowed their desires to intervene in misogynistic banter. This culture of silence can be further complicated for trans*masculine individuals who do not get to take being read as masculine for granted. Thus, the focus on passing, as discussed in the literature, acts as a vehicle of assimilation of trans* people into the gender binary that continues to promote misogyny or at least not resist it, and contributes to social accountability and punishment for those who do not “pass” (Bernstein Sycamore, 2010; Bilodeau, 2009). In this way, passing is not just

about visually appearing masculine, but also acting in ways that match prescribed masculine scripts or does not deviate too far from them.

Race presented itself as an undeniable arbiter of gendered experiences and conceptions of masculinity/ies. This included the institutional and cultural forces of colonialism, racism, anti-blackness, and Whiteness. For example, Daniel's reflections on his journey unearthed how Whiteness overwhelms trans*masculine spaces, including YouTube, which has become an important archival medium that defines what trans*masculine bodies could or should look like (Raun, 2015). Thus, the trans*masculine discourse on YouTube furthers the centering of Whiteness in understanding trans*masculine identity and embodiment. The previously referenced forces often intersected with other systems of oppression. Jay's reflections on how he was silenced as a Black woman illustrated misogynoir, a term coined by Moya Bailey (2013) to describe misogyny directed toward Black women specifically. An example of misogynoir is the angry Black woman trope that is commonly used to dismiss Black women's emotions as unduly expressive and even dangerous, something that is not directed towards otherwise racialized women. Kyle also talked about his distrust of campus authority figures that enacted respectability politics, a strategy that redirects blame onto poor Black people for their marginality rather than on racism, White supremacy, classism, and anti-blackness (Harris, 2014).

Mohammad's reflections alluded to the forces of pinkwashing (Schulman, 2012) and homonationalism (Puar, 2013) that allow for feminist and queer discourse and activism to position Israel as a progressive and gay-friendly nation state. Pinkwashing

(Schulman, 2012) utilizes a variety of marketing and political strategies to promote Israel as queer-friendly, while homonationalism (Puar, 2013) associates efforts towards gay and lesbian equality as in line with nationalist ideology, in this case Israel's role in U.S. domestic and foreign policy. In turn Arab countries and people are necessarily painted in opposition as inherently misogynistic, homophobic, and transphobic. This allows otherwise progressive individuals and entities to rationalize Israel's occupation and displacement of Palestinians, and dismiss the existence of feminist, queer, and trans* Palestinians, Arabs, and/or Muslims. These forces thus allow Mohammad's peers to reimagine him, a Palestinian transgender man and activist, as a terrorist and a threat.

Anti-blackness, racism and sexism often intersected to present restrictive embodiments of masculinities of color, particularly Black manhood and masculinity, that participants resisted through their counter-narratives. These counter-narratives exist as decolonial imaginaries and practices, which Pérez (1999) described as embodiments of “the buried desires of the unconscious, living and breathing in between that which is colonialist and that which is colonized” (p. 110). This “in between” is where many trans*masculine students of color found themselves, as they grappled with taking on identities and expressions that they described as variously tied to colonialist conceptions of misogyny and patriarchy. RJ and Coffee Bean named these intersecting conceptions several times, while Bastian described the decolonial liberation in turning back to Indigenous knowledge of gender and opening it up to “multiplicity, complexity, contestation, and change” (Driskill, Finley, Gilley, & Morgensen, 2011, p. 4).

Several participants also brought up the ways resources and discourse center (White) trans*masculinity, leaving out the perspectives and material needs of trans*women, particularly trans*women of color. By doing so, students like Daniel and Mohammad were questioning which trans* people benefit and on which trans* people's backs. In practice, these hierarchies are created through colonial "models of identity such as gender, race, and sexuality, which are individual and distinct" (Boellstorff et al, 2014, p. 420), which in turn inform how trans* resources and policies and practices meant to serve trans* students are institutionalized. Thus by oppositionally understanding and naming their genders as "communal, connected, and networked" (Boellstorff et al, 2014, p. 420), particularly with trans*women of color, these students are attempting to decolonize how we even think about gender.

The centering of masculine people in the trans* discourse is also tied to gendered notions of professionalism and leadership. Jack's musing about gender, emotion, and professionalism, specifically that emotion – attributed to femininity – is unprofessional was postulated by Davies (1996). She argued that what kept women – here essentialized as feminine – from entering certain professions was "the practice of a profession reflecting a masculine project and repressing or denying those qualities culturally assigned to femininity" (p. 11). This alignment between masculinity and professionalism leads to "the perception that men's roles are more congruent with the leadership role than are those of women" (Ayman & Korabik, 2000), which disadvantages women and other feminine people pursuing leadership roles. Jack's anecdotal observations about masculine women as well confirm studies (e.g., Gershonoff & Foti, 2003) that showed

that women are more likely to be perceived as leaders if they employ an androgynous or masculine gender-role orientation. In combination, these connections between masculinity, femininity, emotion, professionalism, and leadership may also contribute to trans*feminine students reporting lower leadership capacity, efficacy, and positional role attainment on college campuses than trans*masculine students (Dugan et al., 2012).

The institutional masculinization of campus leadership and the centering of masculine ideals and needs maintain structural road blocks for attending to the ways that rape culture is also institutionalized, as RJ most directly named. When discussing his campus' responses to sexual assault and Title IX investigations, Mohammed expressed frustration at campus leadership's dismissal of institutionalized masculinity's role in the perpetuation of and silence about sexual violence on campus. He was critiquing the "real men" meme that protects and maintains hegemonic masculinity in the face of criticism of its harmful impact (Connell, 2005; Nicolazzo, 2015). In this case, the Dean of Students situated sexual assault as something "real men" at the institution, such as himself, would not commit. This allowed the dean and the institution to criticize the act of sexual assault without acknowledging the culture of sexual assault or rape culture that is created and maintained by hegemonic masculinity (Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 2005; Connell, 2005). The previously discussed unique perspective on gender provides trans*masculine students with yet another unique perspective on the discourse and (in)actions around sexual assault on campus, thus necessitating their involvement and engagement. Students like Kyle talked about desiring, but not knowing how to engage authentically when the gender binary leave them invisible in this discussion.

In addition to some of the conceptual pieces discussed in this section, the contributions of trans*masculine college students through their participation and reflections in this study illuminate various implications as related to scholarship and practice. Regarding scholarship, there are implications both in how research is conducted, as well as in further areas of study. Findings from this study has implications for those working with a variety of student populations to ensure campuses are safe, healthy, and inclusive environments in which they can thrive. These environments include curricular and co-curricular areas.

Implications for Research

This study holds significant implications methodologically for research and scholarship. The higher than expected response numbers to the study's call as discussed in chapter 3 indicates some potential learnings for researchers around how to recruit, as well as work with trans* participants. This includes taking stock of researchers' identities, the types of questions asked at all stages of recruitment and participation, as well as the main focus of the study, the recruitment methods, and some ethical considerations. Beyond methodological considerations, the study also illuminates areas of future research, including the inclusion of missing populations and institutional contexts, an expansion of the scope of the study beyond higher education, long term and online studies, pedagogically-centered research, and further investigating of the roles of particular others (e.g., parents) in masculine conceptions.

Methodological Implications

The study provides researchers with more learning around how to recruit and work with trans* participants. For one, the identity of the researcher played a significant role in this study. When asked why participants were interested in interviewing, many responded that it mattered to them that the researcher was trans* identified as well. Jack made this very clear when he said,

Because I know you personally so I was like, “Oh well I trust you.” I think trust is a big part of research participation for me because I have been a participant as a trans* person in a lot of studies, and some of them I left feeling that I shouldn’t have done them. Now I tend to screen researchers, and if they are doing a study on transgender or gender diversity I want them to be trans* identified or have a trans* experience themselves. That’s my sort of boundaries with that.

Jack’s disclosure about trust mirror a lot of my own from experiences being a subject in research conducted by cisgender individuals, when I felt like I was on display and an object of cis-gaze and curiosity rather than a person. Knowing that other trans* individuals may have likely had similar experiences, I wanted potential participants to know who I was. My identity as a trans*masculine individual was information I readily disclosed during the recruitment process both in calls made online via email and social media, as well as on the website where potential participants filled out an interest form. Although not all who expressed interest in participating could be interviewed and thus were not asked about their motivations, the disclosure of my trans* identity likely played a role in the sheer number of individuals that expressed interest with little effort on my end to recruit. In addition to trans* identity, my disclosures included other identities, such as race, sexuality, and ability status, so as to invite responses from a diverse population of trans*masculine students. I anticipated needing to put out the call several

times in order to acquire a diverse enough pool, but ended up only doing so once. If I am asking students to open up to me, I wanted to do what I minimally could to open up to them first and not hide behind an anonymous researcher title. Furthermore, all recruitment emails and materials led potentially interested participants to my personal website that included photographs of myself and information about a variety of organizations that I am involved in, including the Brown Boi Project. Several of the participants of color instantly connected to me because of that involvement, both other BBP alums, as well as students like Coffee Bean who had heard about BBP's values around gender and racial justice. Coffee Bean's knowledge of my involvement with BBP became clear after the conclusion of our interview when they asked if BBP was organizing a gathering at the Creating Change conference where we met. Thus researchers must continue to or start to engage with questions about our positionalities with participants more intentionally, openly, and transparently, and seek to build trust not only with the individual participants of our studies, but also with the communities that our participants belong to and care about.

Cisgender researchers in particular must take stock of how their privilege and their gender identity impacts how they show up for and with trans* people, how trans* students perceive them, and how they may be (mis)interpreting what they hear from trans* students. James' story is an example of one where cisgender researchers, who may not understand how he talks about compensating for his lack of physically-attributable masculinity, might read him as someone who has thoughtlessly internalized a hegemonic masculine ideal. James makes it clear that he understands the choices and decisions he is

making and believes them to be necessary in order to be seen how he wishes to be seen.

The issue here is as much with James – as he is not absolved of all personal responsibility for those decisions – as it is with those around him that may not be willing to interact with him as a man or masculine person or unable to grasp him as such if he does not portray dominance.

Even before arriving at analyzing participants' reflections, the questions that many cis researchers ask reinforce a cis-gaze on the data collected. At the end of the interview, when asked if there was something participants expected to talk about and did not (with the option of being able to if so desired), many like Charles and Seth talked about expecting to get questions that they had answered numerous times before but were content with not discussing. Charles mentioned being tired of “when did you know” types of questions that are more about cis people understanding trans* people on their terms, and do not necessarily provide trans* participants with anything substantive, especially once they have answered these questions for themselves and others a few times already. What this might suggest is that trans* individuals who have had some initial opportunities for reflection – through research or other means – might no longer be interested in participating in research studies if they believe they will merely be repeating themselves and not delve into something deeper or new to them. This means that research studies might be missing the perspectives of trans* participants who may feel more established in their identities and sense of selves, and are not seeking opportunities to talk about “coming out” as trans*.

The trust and shared trans* identities between the researcher and the participants also allowed for participants to unveil an issue of research and justice ethics that scholars ought to consider. As is common practice in studies, pseudonyms were requested or provided to participants to protect their identities. However, this practice elicited particular reactions both in the participants and in myself. As individuals who have often fought hard to name ourselves and to be referred to by our chosen names, the concept of giving that name up and taking on another one while participating in a trans*-focused study felt disingenuous, disappointing, and even counter-intuitive. A few times I heard participants sigh in sadness or ask if they had to when I asked them for a pseudonym. Without saying outright that they had to choose a different name, I would explain the purpose of the pseudonym as a measure of protecting their own privacy. That rationale for me felt hollow and impersonal, as I offered a perfectly logical explanation (PLE; Davis & Harrison, 2013) to why I was separating their name from their story, when for many trans* individuals our names *are* part of our stories, as Coffee Bean talked about when reflecting on the choices they made about their chosen and given names as it related to their conceptions of masculinity, connections to family, and Whiteness. PLEs are rationales that are offered when conscious or unconscious oppression is enacted, often as a way to explain away the oppression and clear one's complicity in it. In this case, I was taking on the role of oppressor, excusing how I was essentially taking away the participants' right to self-determination, taking away their chosen names, and asking them to replace it with one that may or may not have any meaning to them. I believe the conflict presented here between protecting participant privacy and participant agency is a

topic of ethical and justice-oriented concern that ought to be taken on by conscious researchers, discussed, debated and written about, in order to avoid further marginalizing trans* research participants.

As a key objective of the recruitment was to amass and select from a variously diverse pool of potential participants, in addition to identity disclosures already discussed, a few other techniques were used to externally communicate the importance of diversity. One was the use of social media and hashtags in the recruitment stage. A hashtag is a word or short phrase preceded by a hash sign (#) that is used to direct individuals interested in a specific topic to messages, in this case to messages about the study, on Instagram and Twitter. For example, I used hashtags like #qt poc (queer and trans* people of color) and #qpoc (queer people of color) to get the attention of trans*masculine students of color who may peruse that hashtag. Additionally, I posted recruitment messages on a variety of Facebook groups (such as Deaf Queers and Allies, Bois 4 Bois) that specifically targeted trans*masculine individuals underrepresented in most research (respectively, Deaf trans*masculine individuals and other trans*masculine people with disabilities, and trans*masculine individuals attracted to masculine of center people). Finally, I utilized business cards and flyers with visuals to direct potential participants to the study's webpage (see Appendices B and C). These flyers and cards included both terms used by and pictures of trans*masculine people of color and with disabilities and varied representations of masculinity. These were passed out at Creating Change, the largest queer conference in the U.S., including placing them in the conference's identity-based hospitality suites that are frequented by groups such as youth,

people with disabilities, people of color, and bisexual/pansexual/sexually fluid people. The Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, an organization that includes staff of campus LGBTQ centers and offices, conducts their annual institute at Creating Change. The recruitment materials allowed me to provide several for staff to take back to their campuses from all across the country and to relay some of my intentions directly to them about my desires for a diverse pool. A couple of participants named their respective staff as who they heard about the study from and the reason why they chose to trust the call and participate. Recruiting participants from multiple sources and utilizing multiple methods not only helped to amass a large and diverse pool, but also added to the study's credibility.

Another technique that communicated the importance of diversity and self-determination, was the use of open-ended boxes for interested individuals to fill their identities on the online screening form (see Appendix E). Often filling out demographic forms for trans* participants is an anxiety-inducing experience that offer limited and often inaccurate options to self-identify. Jack at one point in the interview and without being asked shared that "I transitioned in 2007. I started taking hormones and changed my name then. By researcher definitions that's when they generally want to know." Jack's comment suggests that researchers often assign trans* status or a particular gender identity onto participants based on physical and administrative transitions, which is a classist practice and one that prioritizes the state's and researchers' conceptions of gender over participants'. Experiences of anxiety and the importance of self-determination is also the case for identities other than gender, such as class, sexuality, and race. For

example, most demographic forms do not include options for Middle Eastern students like Mohammad to identify as such, rather than pick “other” or have to select “White.” In addition, multiracial students like James may find check boxes to be limiting or check boxes may convey that the researcher has a predetermined meaning attached to certain racialized terms that are not reflective of the students’ own conceptions (Johnston, Ozaki, Pizzolato, & Chaudhari, 2014). Allowing students to write in identities, allowed them to represent themselves how they wanted to, alleviating any potential anxieties related to limited options, and subtly letting them know that their own conceptions of their identities matter. This also included adding an “other identities important to you” option that intended to let participants know that they have some power in directing what the content of the research could include as it related to identities. It also allowed me as the researcher to see what identity I neglected to include from the beginning, such as faith or spiritual affiliation that came up a few times in participants’ responses. This likely empowered participants to bring up their journeys with faith in many of the interviews, and in Jones’ case even elicit a second interview driven by a desire to talk about his experiences with his church more.

In addition to multiple sources and methods for recruitment, different interview options were offered to participants. Individuals who shared interest in participating in the study prior to Creating Change who attended the conference were offered the opportunity to interview there in person and three took up that option. Other in-person interviews included the three failed attempts at focus groups that will be discussed later. When in-person interviews were not an option due to distance, participants could

interview via Skype or by phone. These options were chosen as I was able to find freeware that allowed me to record and save the audios from both of these sources easily. Most participants preferred to interview over Skype and a couple interviewed by phone. There was no discernable qualitative difference between these methods on the type of information gathered in the interviews. The only limitation presented itself in the attempted focus groups at two conferences (discussed below), as the time of the interview was bounded by the respective conferences' slot allotments, which were both 90 minutes long. These happened to be enough time for the interviews, but I might have unconsciously rushed through questions in order to finish the interviews before others entered the room for the next session. Although participants were offered opportunities to follow up afterwards as mentioned to them at the end of the interviews, in retrospect it would have alleviated unconscious time pressures on the researcher to mention that from the beginning and follow up again immediately after the conclusion of the conferences.

There were three unsuccessful attempts made to recruit participants for focus groups. This included at the Upper Midwest Queer Indigenous and People of Color (QIPOC) Conference in Minneapolis, MN in early April 2015, a historically women's college in the South in late April 2015, and the Philadelphia Trans Health Conference (PTHC) in early June 2015. One or two focus group sessions were scheduled at each of the above sites, all of which had been picked for being participant-rich environments from which to recruit participants.

Information about the focus groups, including dates, times, and locations, were included in the Upper Midwest QIPOC Conference program booklet. Additionally,

quarter sheet flyers (similar to Appendix B), and social media posts (under the conference's official hashtag of #QIPOCC) updated with the pertinent information were shared during the conference. One of the two sessions did not generate any attendees, while the other generated one participant, who subsequently agreed to a one-on-one interview instead. The conference, attended by about 200, turned out to include both college students, as well as just as many if not more institutionally-unaffiliated area residents. Judging from attendance in identity-specific caucus spaces (e.g., Trans* Men of Color caucus), and disclosures made during various workshops and conversations, the conference did not appear to have attracted many trans*masculine-identified individuals as a whole. Additionally, the sessions competed with many workshops and programs that may have interested potential participants more. These three factors together may be attributable to the low turnout/interest in the focus group sessions.

For the sessions at the historically women's college, pertinently updated full-size flyers (similar to Appendix B) and recruitment emails (similar to Appendix D) were shared with the institution's associate dean of students, who helped secure the rooms and permission to conduct the focus groups. In turn, her staff disseminated the flyers on campus and sent the recruitment emails onto student listservs, as well as colleagues at a number of institutions in the area. This area is known as having an active and racially diverse trans* community, as well as over 20 institutions of higher education, including community and technical colleges, liberal arts colleges, professional and art schools, and several single-sex institutions. The focus group sessions were open to any trans*masculine college students from any institution to pull from a participant-rich and

diverse area. Despite the locale's advantages, only two individuals, both students at the historically women's college, showed up during the first focus group session. They agreed to being interviewed together. One of the two students showed up again the next day, wanting to participate in a better attended focus group, but ended up being the only one present. As his primary motivation was to be able to talk about masculinity with many more trans*masculine people, there was little reason to interview him again.

Aside from the inconvenience of needing to travel to a particular campus that may be unfamiliar to them, potential participants from other campuses may have also been deterred by the institution's identity as a historically women's college. The institution itself has a particularly progressive trans*-inclusive admissions policy by being open to individuals of any gender other than cisgender men, and is known to those affiliated by the institution as a trans*-inclusive community with a small, but vibrant trans*masculine community. Much of this is attributed to the aforementioned associate dean of students and her staff, one of whom is a trans*masculine-identified alum of the institution. This reputation may or may not have been something known to those unaffiliated with the college. The timing of the focus groups, about a week and a half before finals, may have also deterred students from the institution itself from attending.

Finally, the focus group session at PTHC was only attended by two individuals who agreed to interview together. One of the participants happened to be in the room for a workshop session during the slot prior to the focus group and only heard about it at my arrival. Despite attempting to contact conference organizers several times beginning in February 2015, details about the focus group session (i.e., room number and day and time

of session) were not finalized until the day prior, leaving little time and ways to promote the session. Last minute flyers were distributed on site and a few social media posts were made to encourage attendees, who may have already made decisions about sessions they were interested in attending during that time.

All the focus group sites were picked for being participant-rich environments from which to recruit participants. Despite that being the case, particularly in two of the three sites, various logistical factors (such as timing, promotion, and conflicts) rather than disinterest in focus groups necessarily contributed to them not occurring. Having said that, as discussing one's identity and experiences as a trans* person is still heavily stigmatized, some participants may have preferred the privacy and confidentiality of one-on-one interviews. This may have been a particular concern for those with additional marginalized identities who may believe they would feel or have experienced feeling isolated even in a trans*masculine space. For example, someone who might require ASL interpretation might not find a focus group to be a conducive space to get thoughts across, if others in the group are talking too quickly for the interpreter and not providing access points for the individual to participate. On the other hand, as gatherings of many trans*masculine people in one space are rare, some participants might have preferred to participate in a focus group where they believed they would get to connect with other trans*masculine people. It would be worth attempting focus groups in the future, as they may be ripe environments for participants to build knowledge together, find validation in each other's experiences, connect with other trans*masculine individuals, as well as

discuss concerns and conflicts, such as racism and ableism within queer and trans* spaces.

Future Research

The study unveiled ample avenues to pursue future research, not least of all to attend to the missed population and contextual perspectives that would have further contributed to the diversity in the participant pool. Considering almost 44 percent of all undergraduates were enrolled at 2-year and less-than-2-year institutions (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences [IES], 2014), it is reasonable to assume that a large proportion of trans* college students are at these institutions. These institutions also employ broader access for those with financial hardship and recent studies have shown that trans* individuals – particularly trans* people of color – are overrepresented within lower income brackets (Grant, Mottet, & Tanis, 2011). Thus, it is also likely that trans* students, especially trans* students of color, are overrepresented at community colleges as compared to 4-year institutions. This reality necessitates the recruitment of trans*masculine students at community colleges to understand their conceptions of masculinity/ies as informed by their lived and institutionally-contextual experiences, which may further elicit how class informs these conceptions. In addition to community colleges, missing institution types from this study included minority serving institutions (MSI; although Earl, a graduate student, attended an HBCU as an undergraduate and reflected on some of his experiences there), and traditionally “men’s” colleges. Considering the primacy of race that this study elevated in the consideration of masculinity/ies, students at MSIs might bring deeper reflections of their racialized

(trans*)masculine pathways, whereas students at traditionally “men’s” colleges might have particularly contextualized experiences from attending institutions where masculinity and male-ness is an assumed given within the student population.

Two subpopulations of trans*masculine students not represented in this study include international students and undocumented students. Both of these student populations face particular barriers around documentation that may deter them from participating in studies that involve disclosing identities or statuses that expose them to vulnerable situations. International students rely on their visas to maintain their status as students, and their visas are legally tied to their home country’s documentation, including what gender is listed on all their documents. Depending on climate, laws, and policies in their home countries and the international student offices on their campuses, as well as their own desires around gender presentation and disclosures, international trans*masculine students may be concerned about participating in even a confidential research study that may inadvertently jeopardize their visa status. Undocumented students similarly may be concerned about revealing their undocumented status to a researcher they are not familiar with and may or may not trust that person to intentionally or unintentionally not expose them to campus or law officials. These concerns with documentation are a result of the administrative violence imposed by nations and states through the imposition of the gender binary (Spade, 2011). However, international and undocumented trans*masculine students also have unique cross-cultural and multi-national experiences that would influence their conceptualizations of masculinity/ies,

potentially revealing other (trans*)masculine pathways or complicating our understanding of racialized (trans*)masculine pathways.

Although the study's participants were variously diverse, studies that dive deeper into intersectional understandings of masculinities are warranted. For example, studies focused on trans*masculine students with disabilities would further unearth how hegemonic masculinity, ableism, and cissexism collude and impact these students' experiences and self-concepts. Such a focused study would additionally allow for intentionally recruiting a participant pool with a variety of disabilities represented, including physical, cognitive, emotional, and learning-related. Experiences across disabilities vary greatly, including whether these disabilities are "visible" to able bodied people or not, what aspects of campus are inaccessible to them as students, and how their disabilities interact with other identities. Lastly, a study focused on trans*masculine students with disabilities would allow a more critical investigation of the ways some students discussed their disability as being in conflict with their conceptions of themselves as masculine people, as was the case with Bastian. For such a study it would also be imperative that the researcher be familiar with or ideally connected to disability justice work and frames, such as crip theory (McRuer, 2006).

Early on in the recruitment process, there was some indication that this topic would also benefit from expanding the scope of the study and the participant criteria. Eight individuals who filled out the online participant screening form (see Appendix E) were promptly disqualified for answering "Neither" to the question "Are you a current undergraduate or graduate student?" A few of these individuals, as well as others who

did not fill out the form sent emails and Facebook messages with a deep desire to participate in the study despite knowing that it was meant for current college students. These efforts signify that many trans*masculine individuals are hungry to engage in conversations about masculinity and perhaps not afforded many opportunities. Thus, studies that expand the participant pools to former college students (alumni or no-longer-matriculating) or even individuals who have never attended an institution of higher education are warranted to expand our conceptions of the plurality of masculine possibilities, but also be the discursive opportunities that many of these individuals are looking for and not finding.

Beyond expanding the scope of the study, scholarship on gender would also benefit from research centering trans*feminine and non-binary individuals. The literature on women in higher education for example is overwhelmingly driven by and about cisgender women with no critical analysis of how their cisgender realities inform their gender conceptions and identity developments (Evans et al., 2010). Mirroring scholarship on men in higher education, this essentializes all women as cisgender and often makes womanhood synonymous with femininity and femaleness. Thus, a replication of this study that investigates how trans*feminine students conceptualize and define femininity and/or womanhood is warranted. Additionally, students are assumed to have one gender that corresponds with either manhood/masculinity/maleness or womanhood/femininity/femaleness. This leaves out genderqueer, agender, non-binary, and fluidly gendered students whose conceptions of gender and lived realities in binarist institutions are missing (Bilodeau, 2009; Spade, 2011). Their perspectives from within,

across, through, and outside of the gender binary are crucial if we are to form a fuller perspective of how gender operates, mediates students' lives, and is institutionalized in higher education.

As this study has revealed, gender is dialogic, relational, and constantly evolving, which further informs some potential avenues and methods for research. Considering the role that YouTube plays in constructing what it means to be trans*masculine (Raun, 2015), studies that utilize this online platform as a dialogic and reflective space for trans*masculine college students may elicit particularly powerful insights. There are options with the platform that allow for privacy and confidentiality, such as only allowing access to the videos to those with an invite to an otherwise hidden URL. The platform can also be used to conduct asynchronous focus groups that are not limited to particular timeframes, but rather allow for participants to build on each other's points and videos over days or even weeks and months. The extended timeline would also allow participants to come back to their own previous reflections and re-engage with them, adjusting their conceptions as they go. Such a study would provide the researcher with uniquely rich data both in content, but also in the opportunity to analyze shifts and added complexity, even in some instances watching those shifts occur.

Whether online through a platform like YouTube or by repeating the interview methods used in the current study, there is also a need to reconnect with this study's participants in the future. Long-term studies involving trans* college students are non-existent and thus trans* students' evolving conceptions of masculinity and gender is not investigated. Being able to reconnect with participants across their tenure as college

students, through undergraduate, graduate, and professional studies, and even beyond, would deepen higher education scholars' and administrators understanding of how institutional contexts inform and influence gender identity and conceptions of masculinity by students. Some students, such as James, might also serve as particularly intriguing case studies. James' multiraciality and how he made meaning of his racial identity as it related to his masculinity, as well as his adoption of hegemonic masculinity as a complex active practice rather than as passive internalization, made that interview a particularly poignant one for me as the researcher. Being able to reconnect with him in the future and listening to his shifting self-conceptions would be a truly insightful privilege.

Some of the experiences that other students of color shared as well suggest some gaps in scholarship. What Earl, Jay, and Kyle clearly conveyed about how anti-Blackness showed up for them in (and outside of) the classroom necessitates pedagogically-g geared research. Building on scholarship on culturally relevant pedagogy (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1995), future research ought to investigate the impact of anti-Blackness on students' in-classroom engagement, as well as what pro-Black, Black-centered, or Black-inclusive pedagogy and its impact looks like. In addition to this research being useful for faculty, it would also benefit administrators who construct the co-curricular environments that tend to continue to mirror society's anti-Black attitudes. In addition to these pedagogically-centered studies, the participation in studies of trans*masculine college students who attend HBCUs may provide comparative data that can showcase the impact of Black-centered or pro-Black communities. For example, Earl talked about the significance of getting affirmation from his peers of color, particularly

cis Black men, as an undergraduate at an HBCU. What might that experience looked or felt like at a predominantly White institution or other type of MSI? Was that experience possible partly because of the Black-centered space in which it occurred? Investigating such questions would further inform how to construct Black-inclusive campus environments across institutional types.

The role of fathers in trans*masculine students' conceptions of masculinity, particularly early on, was reflective of much of the literature discussed in the literature review that posits the importance of fathers in the generational maintenance and transferal of masculinity and traditional gender roles or their interruption. In this study, all representations of positive models of masculinity in fathers were shared by trans*masculine students of color without exception. Future research ought to investigate the intersectional role of Whiteness and masculinity that led to an embodiment of variously toxic masculinities in fatherhood, such as ones shared by Daniel, Blake, Seth, and Eli. How does race play a role in the positive masculine representations in fathers of trans*masculine students of color, such as Jay and Charles?

In addition to fathers, this study presented mothers and other women in trans*masculine college students' lives as playing particularly significant roles in their conceptualizations of masculinity. This finding conflicts with existing studies that showcased fathers and other men as the main influencing individuals. This encourages the need to study how women, including trans*women, and feminine-identified people of all genders conceptualize and even embody masculinity, as well. Such a study would further the challenge to de-essentialize cisgender men as the sole arbiters of masculinity.

Implications for Practice

The study's findings provide faculty and higher education and student affairs practitioners with a multitude of opportunities to improve and expand on their practice in curricular and co-curricular spaces on college campuses, and even beyond. Some of these implications build on or connect to the implications for research and scholarship discussed in the previous section. These practical implications seek to emphasize higher education institutions' liberatory potential through an intersectional gendered lens. Furthermore, while many of the implications focus on particular segments of the campus community, participants' articulation of the institutionalized nature of hegemonic masculinity ought to be taken into account when working on change at the micro level.

The immense response to the call for participants and the findings indicate a clear need for trans*masculine college students to be afforded the opportunity to engage in discussions with other men and masculine people, should they choose to, and discuss matters of identity, masculine privilege, and their roles in the lives of women and feminine people. This felt especially salient for trans*masculine students of color who expressed connections with and validations from men of color in their lives as particularly significant in their development of healthy masculinities. With many institutions providing programming that bring men of color together for community building and retention efforts, staff should critically evaluate how to make those programs accessible and participatory for trans*masculine students of color as well.

The inclusion of trans*masculine students in men's or men of color programming would benefit them, as well as the other students utilizing the programs. Many of these

programs are built around discussion and dialogue, as well as opportunities for the students involved to get to know each other and build meaningful relationships.

Discussion and dialogue would allow for students like James to parse out behaviors that are about compensating for masculinity, as well as create supportive networks and communities to minimize that need. Students like Gabriel, as well, who utilize their Whiteness as a shield when they feel unsafe on campus as trans* students would also benefit by having access to a space where their genders and self-conceptions are validated as they are, rather than ascribed or imposed. Finally, many students like Earl also reflected on incidents where they left problematic discourse unchallenged. These experiences are not unique to trans*masculine students and many cis men may also share similar ones, but not have the particularly nuanced way that many of the participants in this study discussed them and recognized the contextual and intersectional influences in their decisions – such as the Earl’s desire to be able to come back to the barber shop, a space of bonding and community with other Black men. By sharing and discussing the feelings of not wanting to rock the boat in certain spaces, or feeling alone or out of place in them, participants in such programs can build resiliency and efficacy with each other, as well as imagine and practice ways to intervene in similar situations without risking certain spaces becoming inaccessible to them. Thus, the redesign of these programs to affirmatively include trans*masculine students becomes not just a practice for trans* acceptance, but also acts as an anti-patriarchal and anti-racist practice. Men of color programmers in particular ought to seek out the expertise of the Brown Boi Project

facilitators like Cole to rethink what a gender diverse community of masculine young people of color can look like and achieve.

In addition to these programs being prime locales for such dialogue and anti-oppressive practice building, they are also well suited for off campus partnerships. The responses to the study from non-college goers with deep desire to engage in conversation about masculinity suggests that many in the community around our institutions are looking for ways to meaningfully understand and talk about masculinity. By partnering with surrounding communities through K-12 schools, community centers, and non-profit organizations, institutions could have positive impacts on masculinity and society as a whole beyond the campus bubble. Toxic masculinity, especially as connected to White supremacy and nationalism, has been linked to the mass killings that have become something of a norm in the United States (e.g., Chemaly, 2015; Devega, 2015). Institutions and community spaces can bring their varying expertise, resources, and networks together to address a very real problem at its source.

Partnering with the community at large may also bring in opportunities for trans*masculine peer mentorship, including intergenerationally, for trans*masculine students who are or may feel alone on campus. As Kyle, talked about these mentorships can be sources of affirmation and support, as well as relationships that allow for trans*masculine college students to navigate their entry into and in masculinity with guidance from others who understand their journey better than cis men would. Thus, intergenerational mentorship in trans* contexts is not always about age – meaning between an older and younger trans* person – but can also relate to differential stages of

transition, whether speaking physically or socially or both. In addition to finding some of these mentoring relationships in the community around the institutions, trans* alumni may also be an untapped source and can also help current trans* students navigate the institution and get connected to supportive staff or faculty they did not previously know.

The role of alumni in creating or resisting a trans*-affirming and non-patriarchal campus environment can also extend to cis alumni. For example, Demian had shared how alumni at their institution through participation in a Facebook group associated with the school, have said “really mean” remarks and comments on gender-related topics. Alumni, particularly cis alumni who are the majority at any given higher education institution, often pass on traditions and cultural norms and beliefs that can impede progress towards social change. Thus, staff that are interested in shifting the conversation and structure of gender at the institution could benefit from partnering with the campus alumni office to engage alums more positively or connect to specific alums who might have strong voices and influence within the greater alumni community.

The study also highlighted the role of staff, faculty, and administration in promoting a gender diverse environment on campus that affirms students in their full humanity. For one, the study further validated the need to recruit and employ trans* staff and faculty. Several participants, such as Coffee Bean, talked about the role that trans* staff and faculty played in allowing them to show up authentically in their masculinities, as guides and at times father-figures on their gender journeys. Their roles as father-figures become especially important considering participants’ discussion of how their own fathers often taught them masculinities they did not desire to emulate or alternatively

provided them glimpses of what they could embody. Institutions ought to assess how cissexism or genderism impacts their ability to recruit and retain trans* employees, in order to address structural barriers that current and potential trans* employees face. Little has been written about the experiences of trans* staff and scholars in higher education (Jourian, Simmons, & Devaney, 2015), and thus this is also an area ripe for study, which Simmons is currently undertaking as a dissertation study. Some of the implications from that study could inform how to set up trans* people to be mentors and resources for trans* students. Participants like Bastian also highlighted the importance of cis staff and faculty to live in their full humanity, acting as models for gender liberation rather than gender police that maintain strict binary expectations and presentations of themselves and others.

Trans* students of color like RJ also brought up the importance of White LGBTQ, including trans*, staff members to talk about their White identity. Considering the dominance of homonormativity and Whiteness in LGBTQ campus centers (Self, 2015), queer students of color need to know that White staff in these centers are critically aware of their Whiteness and White privilege, how it impacts their lives and work, and how they resist it. Organizations like the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals ought to engage in dismantling Whiteness in these spaces, through vehicles like their membership's listserv, mentorship opportunities, and their various national and regional institutes. This work is critical if these centers are to adequately be a resource to queer students of color. This especially includes trans*

students of color who may already consider these spaces to not serve their needs as trans* students (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014; Renn, 2010).

Even when campus resources, including LGBTQ campus centers, serve trans* students, participants like Blake and Daniel reflected on how these are disproportionately designed with trans*masculine students in mind, particularly White trans*masculine students (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014). Higher education institutions as a whole, and particularly staff within these centers ought to redesign these resources with the diversity of trans* students in mind, including genderqueer and trans*feminine students. The collusion of misogyny and cissexism, known as transmisogyny, often has a particular adverse exclusionary impact on trans*women (Serano, 2013), which also feeds into trans*masculine students being more readily seen as leaders on campus, rather than trans*feminine students (Dugan et al., 2012).

The dominance of masculinity and men in leadership and professional realms (Ayman & Korabik, 2010) also extends to female-dominated fields, as was reflected on by participants like Bastian who experienced privilege associated with their masculinity as a teacher. Thus faculty in these fields, as well as staff in career services on campus, ought not to assume that conversations on gender and work against sexism are unnecessary in these domains by virtue of (cis) women being in the majority. Similarly, students like Eli and Jones showcased that trans*masculine students are not necessarily fitting in or thriving in male-dominated fields and disciplines due to their masculinity. Cissexism in these fields, as well as misogyny that trans*masculine students experience (due to misgendering as Jones brought up) and are keenly aware of because of their

unique perspectives, have an adverse impact on them seeing themselves as belonging in their chosen disciplines and professions. Thus career services staff need training on issues of oppression (including sexism and cissexism) in a variety of professional realms so as to properly support students in navigating their soon-to-be careers and related professional associations. Faculty need similar consciousness-raising as many of them may be mentors to these students, connections to professional networks, and references for graduate and professional schools.

As experiences of trans*masculine participants in male-dominated fields showed that their masculinities alone did not automatically make these spaces accessible to trans* students, their masculinities should also not be assumed to make “women’s” spaces automatically undesirable or inaccessible to them. Chapter 2 reviewed some of the recent news and literature on trans*masculine students’ experiences at traditionally women’s colleges, much of which represented these institutions as discursively and actionably exclusionary towards trans* students (e.g. Hart & Lester, 2011; Marine, 2009). This study is not disputing that reality, particularly for trans*feminine students, who are often excluded even when trans*masculine students can matriculate into these institutions. A student coalition at Smith College highlighted this hypocrisy and recently was successful in pushing their administration to rectify their policies (Reynolds, 2015). The work done at some of these institutions has already made an impact for some of the participants in this study. In fact, all three of the study’s participants who were attending traditional women’s colleges – Eli, Peter, and Seth – described mostly positive and trans* affirming experiences with exceptions being attributed to certain faculty or peers rather than the

institution as a whole. Similarly, Charles felt welcomed and included as part of the student staff of his institution's women's center. Their articulations of these experiences spoke to the role that feminist spaces – which these specific institutions and women's center were described as being – play in promoting gender liberation for all, not just cis women. Staff at these institutions and spaces would do well to also reflect on whether trans*feminine students would have similarly affirming and welcoming experiences, and what ought to be done to assure they do. Furthermore, it would benefit other entities on campus and other traditionally women's colleges for the ones the study participants talked about to invest time and energy into doing cross-departmental and -institutional advocacy and education. There could also be room for trans* students who have had positive experiences in these spaces to take part in some of these efforts, gaining valuable skills themselves and being part of asset-based thinking, assessment, and trainings. This would resist the overwhelming amount of deficit-based literature currently dominating scholarship and discourse relating to trans* college students and their experiences.

Often women's centers on campuses, directly or indirectly, due to embedded function or out of necessity, are connected to matters related to sexual assault and consent on campus. This area is another one for women's centers, as well as other entities on campus that seek to address campus rape culture, to work on bringing trans*masculine students into the fold. Some participants like Kyle and Coffee Bean reflected on their own experiences of finding themselves in horrible situations where they had sex that they either did not want to or did not enjoy. Their experiences speak to the need for consent-related programming to also be tied to positive sexualities and the importance of

communication, not just in acquiring consent, but also in centering desire in seeking consent, but with clear distinctions drawn. Some have used memes like “consent is sexy” to promote consent. However, such a meme ignores that consent in and of itself does not bring about *pleasurable* sexual encounters. Considering that pleasure is not a given and not a legal (or even moral) requirement when engaging in sex, campaigns that equate consent with sexiness or pleasure also muddy messages that ought to mandate consent (Brute Reason, 2013; Gebreyes, 2015). Once distinguished from each other, efforts to center desire and pleasure as another vehicle through which to empower students in taking charge of their sexualities can have a few positive impacts. It can reduce feelings of shame about sex that may deter some, particularly women, from communicating with their partners about what they are enjoying or not enjoying. It can shift the motivation and goal of sex for others, particularly men, away from conquest and competition towards aiming to give and receive pleasure. Finally, for asexual students, it provides a way for them to talk about how while they may consent to sex, likely due to societal pressure that assumes that everyone wants to have sex, they may not be deriving any pleasure from it. Involving trans*masculine college students in these conversations and efforts allows them as well to assert control over their own bodies and what consent and desire look and feel like.

Relatedly, during one of the two feedback sessions conducted to present initial findings to other trans* people and elicit responses, an interesting conversation about consent arose. Reacting to quotes shared from participants naming how they seem to be perceived as more threatening by women the more they present masculine, several

presentation attendees talked about their experiences renegotiating consent, specifically with women, as they transitioned. Consent here was being discussed in a broad sense, beyond just in terms of intercourse, but also with any form of physical contact, including hugging, subtle touching, or even being in close proximity to women. Considering the much needed and ongoing conversations about consent and sexual violence on college campuses, exploring how consent is understood and how that understanding has shifted or how boundaries have shifted for trans*masculine college students could elucidate a deeper understanding on what consent looks like for college students and how to improve our educational programming on the topic.

Kyle also talked at length about his desire and conflicting inaccessibility to participate in conversations about consent and sexual assault. RJ was frustrated by the lack of participation of masculine people in the efforts to eradicate rape on campus. Programming, educational materials, and staff who work with victims, survivors, and perpetrators often reify heteronormative gender binaries that assume only cisgender men are perpetrators and only assault cisgender women. While that may be the most prominent and definitely the most known about dynamic with sexual assaults, it is wholly inaccurate and harmful. In fact, rates of violence against trans* people, including sexual violence and abuse are much higher than rates for cisgender people, with 64% of trans* people reporting having experienced sexual assault in their lifetime (Grant et al., 2011). The sole and even overwhelming focus on cisgender male-female sexual assaults is a kind of informational erasure of trans* people that reifies the pervasive institutional erasure of trans* people that excludes them from acquiring trans* competent health care,

including as survivors of sexual assault (Bauer et al., 2009). Thus, campus resources related to sexual violence, from promotional materials to staff, ought to be equipped with trans* competencies and messaging that lets trans* students know about their accessibility. Furthermore, trans*masculine college students are looking for ways to be proactively and positively involved in addressing toxic masculinity and the epidemic of rape on college campuses and thus opportunities to do so ought to also address the cissexism that leaves them unable to talk about their experiences with and knowledge about assault authentically and safely.

The pervasiveness of cisnormativity and genderism in every realm of a college campus, from Greek Life and athletics to residence halls and student affairs departments, can begin to be chipped away by adopting the asking and respectful use of gender pronouns or proper gender pronouns (PGPs) as a campus-wide cultural practice. Especially non-binary identified participants in the study like Blake and RJ talked at great length about the constant misgendering they experience, and the ways each and every time that particular microaggression occurs, their feelings of safety, community, and voice dissipate. Others like Peter and Seth (incidentally both students at traditionally women's colleges) talked about how elated and empowered they felt when administrators, peers, and faculty asked them (and other students) their PGPs. Demian reflected on how the use of PGPs from the very beginning of their college career – orientation and the first day of classes – set a campus-wide tone for them that let them know they were part of the campus community. They also happened to be the one participant that shared knowing trans* peers all over campus, particularly at the residence

hall where they lived. This was a far cry from how trans* students, including most of the participants in this study, experience their identities as isolated and invisible on campus (Bilodeau, 2009). While asking PGPs might appear to cis people as being annoying, inconsequential, or even a burden, this seemingly minor act has a culture-shifting impact for trans* people on campus. Staff and faculty can make this a part of introductions during classes, meetings, and events, as well as include it in syllabi, email signatures, and online bios. By beginning to create spaces within one's own sphere of influence where PGPs are a justice-oriented cultural practice, these can build a campus-wide momentum that can significantly improve trans* students' sense of belonging, connection, and efficacy. This is particularly true in spaces other than LGBTQ campus centers, conferences, and student organizations where such practices may already be expected or assumed to be occurring.

As some students like Peter and Demian shared, particularly around the use of PGPs, faculty have a particularly powerful role to play in the classroom for trans*masculine students. It is worth noting that it was Black trans*masculine students – Earl, Kyle, and Jay – that most talked about being disengaged from the institution, engaging only as minimally as they needed to, often making decisions about how much energy to put towards their classes or whether to get involved on campus. Earl, for example, identified how racism and anti-Blackness influences the “exhausting” decisions he makes about if and how to show up in the classroom, silencing himself, and doing what was minimally required of him to pass by, all while experiencing microaggressions and invalidations of his own lived realities. Those of us who facilitate classrooms, as

professors and teachers or otherwise, ought to reflect on this articulation, particularly when we are tasked with evaluating students' participation and engagement in the class. We must ask what our role is in furthering Black trans*masculine students feeling like they are not meant to belong in higher education, how racism and cissexism impact their performance, and what we can do to alleviate this reality for many Black students. Considering that data on Black students', particularly Black men's, low access, retention, and graduation rates is widely available and known, at least anecdotally, we must also investigate what is blocking us from implementing pedagogy and practice to address these institutional and structural barriers for Black students.

Some participants like Blake and Jay also talked about going to conferences away from their institutions to connect to trans* peers and trans*-related resources that were not available to them on their campuses. Institutions, academic departments, and multicultural and LGBTQ offices ought to set aside and advocate for financial resources for trans*masculine students to travel to and attend such conferences. Conferences such as Creating Change, the Philadelphia Trans Health Conference, the Upper Midwest QIPOC Conference, the newly emerging Trans* Studies conference, and many others across the country would offer these students with peer networks for personal and academic support and community. Additionally, trans*masculine students who are often unduly burdened with the task of improving trans* access and resources at their campuses, would benefit from conferences that expose them to peers doing similar work at other institutions, workshops for skill-building around advocacy and self-care, and opportunities to work on how their intersecting identities may be limiting the progress

they are attempting to make. As previously discussed, White trans*masculine students' needs and leadership are prioritized at college campuses, and these students are inappropriately tasked with representing a wide array of trans* identities and lived experiences in their education and advocacy work. Conferences where they interact and learn with diverse trans* people is necessary so as not to continue to perpetuate the systemic exclusion of non-binary and feminine trans* students, and trans* students of color.

This work should not rest solely on trans* students' shoulders. Faculty and staff ought to also invest time and resources to attend these conferences, as well as ones closely related to their disciplines and functional areas, such as attending trans* specific sessions promoted by the Queer Special Interest Group at the American Educational Research Association's (AERA) Annual Meeting. These would amplify their ability to build trans*inclusive curricula in and out of the classroom, conduct trans*inclusive research and assessment, and be aware of networks and resources they can tap into for continued self and peer education and training. Staff and faculty can also act as advocates with their trans* peers within their academic and professional associations to amplify their voices and invest in their recruitment and development in their fields, including within higher education and student affairs (Jourian et al., 2015).

Final Reflections

This study was one of the single most ambitious, gut-wrenching, life-giving, and spirit-defining endeavors I have ever had the privilege and obligation to undertake. I am not sure whether I picked it, or it picked me. At times it felt as if I had no choice but to

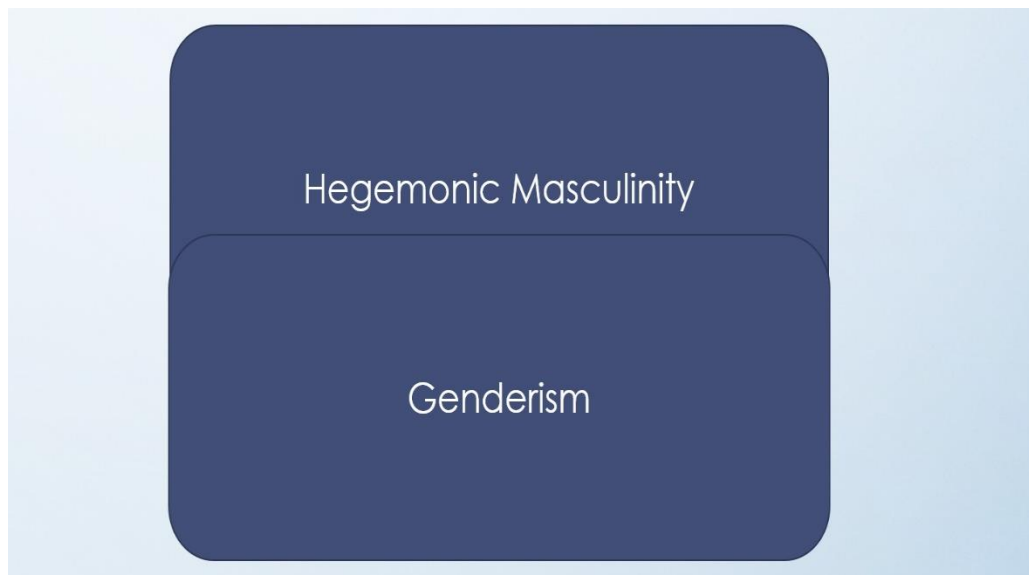
ask the questions, to hear the answers, and to have both ringing inside me with the power of the Tsar's Bell in the Kremlin, the largest bell in the world. It felt heavy, at times undoable, and always necessary. Most of the time, I was not sure whether I was the right person to be asking these questions and making meaning of the answers – I am still not. Yet, here it is. It is done and I was in the center of it. I did not lead it; it, and the 19 students I talked to led it. Hearing the names and murders of trans*woman after trans*woman and the urgency required to create a different world where we hear their names without their murders led it. CeCe McDonald and her refusal to be among those names led it. The three Black women, Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors, who started the #BlackLivesMatter movement to fight anti-Blackness led it. Charlene Carruthers and the Black Youth Project 100 that have galvanized the city of Chicago to demand funding Black futures instead of Black incarceration and murder led it. The Students for Justice in Palestine across the country shining a light on higher education's complicity in Israel's occupation of Palestine and demanding participation in the boycott, divestment, and sanction (BDS) movement led it. A trans* liberation movement started and led by Sylvia Rivera, Marsha P. Johnston, Miss Major Griffin-Gacy, Bamby Salcedo, Cecilia Chung and so many other trans*women of color led this too. My Brown Boi Project family nourished it and led it. The artists functioning as the cultural workers across these movements led it. The Dyet High School hunger strikers demanding accessible, culturally-relevant, and community-driven education for their children led it. People like Mia Mingus, Eli Clare, and Kay Ulanday Barrett, Edward Ndopu who relentlessly remind us that disability justice is intertwined with racial, gender, class, and

queer justice led it. All types of people, organizations, communities, and movements known or unknown to me that are imagining and fostering a nonviolent world that centers gender self-determination as a necessary ingredient in freedom and liberation for all led it. It was listening to and reading (about) them, building community with some of them, and watching their full humanities, fallibilities, and convictions on display on social media feeds and in person that drove this project through me. I can only hope that I can get a nod of approval from many of them.

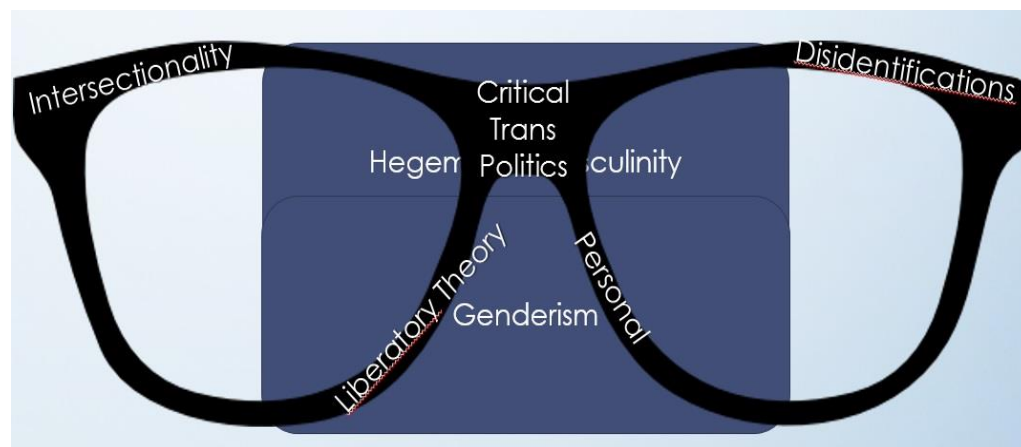
This past year was a personally challenging one. During the same time as I embarked on this project I was confronted with the hardest and most personal “moment” of accountability in my life. My masculinity and my enactment of it was called out as violent, toxic, abusive, self-serving, and ultimately everything that I feared it could be. It shook me at my core, unbalanced me time and time again, and unraveled me. It was this study and the 19 students that formed it that reoriented me, at times saved my life, and gave me reason to see myself in my own humanity, culpability, and resistance to seemingly insurmountable forces that almost did me in. It was truly a labor of (self) love and hope; a privilege and an obligation.

APPENDIX A
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: A VISUAL

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: A VISUAL



The Social and Institutional Context



Framing the Context

APPENDIX B
PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT FLYER

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT FLYER

[Front side: Pictures are of people known to the researcher. Permission was sought and given prior to using their likeness for this purpose. Quarter sheets for easy dissemination]



[Back side]

Interested in being in a study on trans(*)masculine people's definitions of masculinity?

Want to learn more about it?

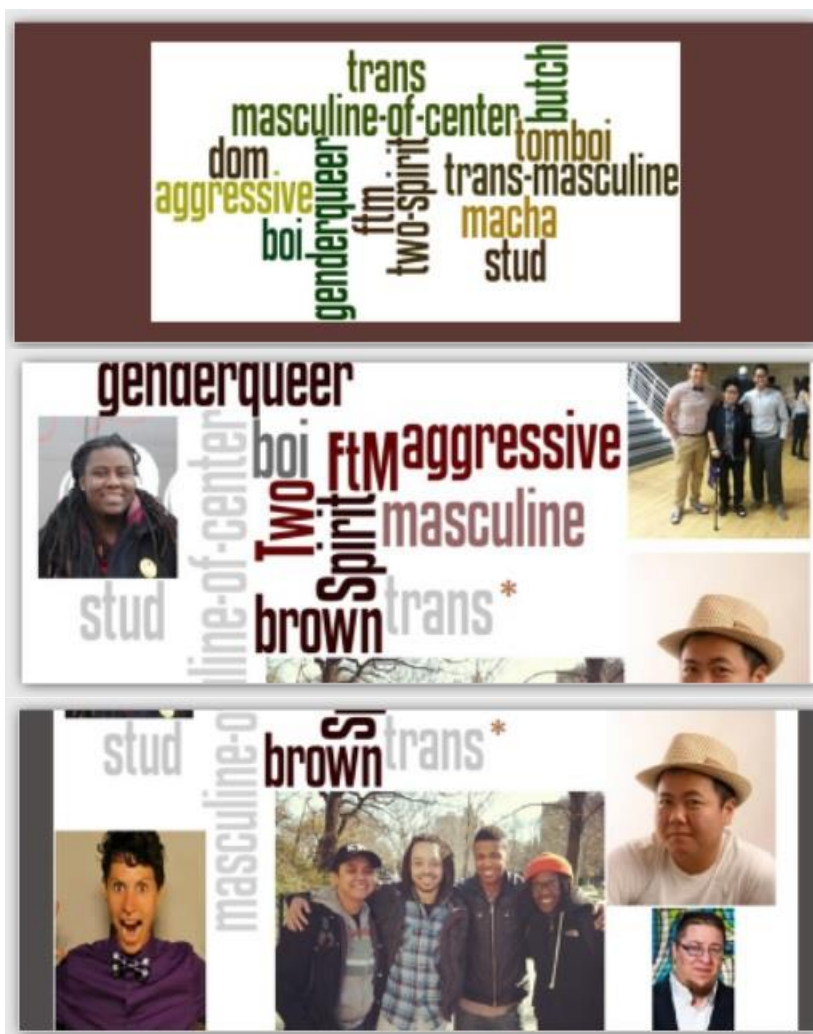
Check out www.tjjourian.net/study or contact T.J. Jourian at tjourian@luc.edu

You can also find out more about T.J. at <http://www.tjjourian.net>

Diverse voices across race, sexuality, ability, and socioeconomic status are especially encouraged to participate. IRB approved

APPENDIX C
PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT BUSINESS CARDS

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT BUSINESS CARDS



Three different versions of the front of the business cards



The back of the business cards for all three versions

APPENDIX D
PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Subject: Seeking trans*masculine students for study

Dear [include name or descriptors like 'colleagues'],
Please review and disseminate the following email to your students.
Thank you,
T.J. Jourian

Dear student,

I hope this message finds you well. I am a PhD candidate in Higher Education conducting a study on how trans*masculine students define masculinity. I myself identify as a trans*man of color and wish to center our stories and voices in definitions and redefinitions of masculinity. You can learn more about me at <http://www.tjjourian.net>.

I define trans*masculine pretty broadly, meaning if you were assigned female at birth and currently identify more with masculinity when it comes to your gender, than you might fit this definition. Ultimately, it is up to you to define yourself. Trans*masculine can include trans*men or female-to-male people, masculine-of-center folks, bois, Two Spirit folks, genderqueer individuals, and more. If you are still unsure if you fit the criteria for the study, please do not hesitate to contact me for further clarification.

I want to include all kinds of trans*masculine voices, across race, sexuality, ability, and socioeconomic status. If you also identify as a person of color (including African-American or Black, Asian (American) Pacific Islander, Latin@ or Hispanic, Indigenous or Native American, Middle Eastern, Multiracial), a person with disabilities, gay/queer/bi/pansexual, and/or working class, you are encouraged to participate.

If you are interested to learn more and potentially participate in the study, check out this link: <http://www.tjjouriant.net/study>. Here you will find more information about the study, including an informed consent form, contact information of the study's faculty sponsor and the institutional review board (IRB), and an opportunity to indicate your interest.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Again, please do not hesitate to let me know if you have any questions or concerns,

Sincerely,

T.J.

APPENDIX E
ONLINE PARTICIPANT SCREENING FORM

ONLINE PARTICIPANT SCREENING FORM

[First page at <http://www.tjjourian.net/study>]

[Image from Appendix B]

I am a PhD Candidate in Higher Education conducting a study on how trans*masculine college students define masculinity. I myself identify as a trans*man of color and wish to center diverse stories and voices in definitions and redefinitions of masculinity.

I define trans*masculine pretty broadly, meaning if you were assigned female at birth and currently identify more with masculinity when it comes to your gender, than you might fit this definition. Ultimately, it is up to you to define yourself. Trans*masculine can include trans*men or female-to-male people, masculine-of-center folks, bois, Two Spirit folks, genderqueer individuals, and more. If you are still unsure if you fit the criteria for the study, please do not hesitate to **contact me** [hyperlinked to <http://www.tjjourian.net/contact-me>] for further clarification.

I want to include all kinds of trans*masculine voices, across race, sexuality, ability, and socioeconomic status. If you also identify as a person of color (including African-American or Black, Asian (American) Pacific Islander, Latin@ or Hispanic, Indigenous or Native American, Middle Eastern, Multiracial), a person with disabilities, gay/queer/bi/pansexual, and/or working class, you are especially encouraged to participate. **Click here if you are interested in participating** [hyperlinked to <http://www.tjjourian.net/study-consent-form.html>]. Here you will find more information about the study, including an informed consent form, contact information of the study's faculty sponsor and the institutional review board (IRB), and an opportunity to indicate your interest.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Again, please do not hesitate to **contact me** [hyperlinked to <http://www.tjjourian.net/contact-me>] if you have any questions or concerns.

[Second page at <http://www.tjjourian.net/study-consent-form.html>]

[First image from Appendix C]

Consent to Participate in Research

[See content of Appendix G until and inclusive of contacts and questions section]

By clicking on the button below you agree to participate in the study.

[Image of button with the word "Yes" on it; hyperlinked to <http://www.tjjourian.net/study-form.html>]

[Third page at <http://www.tjjourian.net/study-form.html>]

Are you a current undergraduate or graduate student?

- Undergraduate student
- Graduate student
- Neither

Do you identify as trans*masculine, meaning you were assigned female at birth and currently identify more with the masculine/male/man ends of the gender spectrum? This may include but is not exclusive identities listed in the previous page.

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

What words would you use to describe your:

- Gender identity:

- Race and/or ethnicity:

- Ability/disability:

- Sexuality:

- Socioeconomic status/class:

- Other identities important to you:

Please enter your email address: _____

[SUBMIT BUTTON]

[END OF SURVEY]

APPENDIX F
FOCUS GROUP / INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

FOCUS GROUP / INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Note: The focus group protocol was used for dual interviews

Preliminaries:

- Welcome everyone/individual and encourage people to get food/snacks and settle. During this time consent forms and demographic sheets are passed around and collected.
- Introduce myself and provide some background on the research study:
 - The purpose of this focus group is to investigate your understandings with masculinity. I am interested in hearing about the experiences and influences that have shaped your understanding of masculinity, what it means to you, and in what ways you identify with it. As research on this topic is sparse at best, I'll be open to whatever directions we take this conversation in ways that are the most meaningful to everyone. Your perspectives and stories are very important to me. Your backgrounds and experiences are varied, and I invite you to share them openly, regardless of how similar or different they may be with what others are sharing.
- Some things to take note of:
 - Please know I will be tape recording the conversation so that I can accurately transcribe and capture your ideas and contributions.
 - No real names will be attached to any quotes or ideas and your responses will remain confidential in all reporting.
 - Please be open and honest. The more you share the better.
 - FOCUS GROUP ONLY: Please be respectful of the diversity of opinions offered during the focus group. You may not all share the same opinion on some topics, or may have had varying experiences and I'd like to hear them. I want to be sure to hear from everyone, so speak up, but be cognizant of the time so we have a chance to hear from each of you. Please also respect each other's confidentiality by not sharing what is said here to others.

Introductory Segment

- FOCUS GROUP: We'll start our session together by individually sharing your names and pronouns, and briefly describing why you decided to come to this focus group today.
- INTERVIEW: Tell me what prompted you to agree to this interview today.

Overall Experiences/Conceptions:

- Can you share a story about an instance or a time when you remember feeling masculine?

- a. [PROMPTS HERE] – How did you feel? What do you remember about your surroundings? Who was around?
- How would you describe masculinity?
 - a. What words do you use to describe your own masculinity?
 - b. Where do these terms come from?
- As you think about this term ‘masculinity’, what comes up for you?
 - a. What does the term conjure up in terms of images?
 - b. What does the term conjure up in terms of people?
 - c. What does the term conjure up in terms of emotions?
 - d. What does the term conjure up in terms of your experiences?
 - e. How would you define masculinity?
 - f. How would you define *your* masculinity?
 - g. What does it mean for you to be masculine?
- As you think about masculinity at your school, what comes up for you?
 - a. How would you define masculinity on your college campus?
 - b. What does masculinity look like in people on your campus?
 - c. What does it mean (for you) to be masculine at your school?
- In what ways, if any, do you feel your masculinity is different or similar to other masculine people? Or other trans*masculine people?
 - a. Do you get the opportunity to and how do you connect with other masculine people? Other trans*masculine people?

Influencers of Masculinity:

- What has influenced or shaped your understanding or definition of masculinity?
 - a. Who has influenced or shaped your understanding/definition of masculinity?
 - i. Authority figures; administrators; staff; faculty; parents/guardians; siblings; other family; peers; celebrities and sports figures; religious leaders or mentors; student leaders; queer/trans* community leaders/activists; men; women; other trans*masculine people?
 - b. How, if at all, does your institution shape your understanding/definition of masculinity?
 - i. Major/discipline/classes; organizations; programs/events; messaging; residence halls; on-campus jobs?
 - c. Others influencers?
 - i. Books; movies/documentaries; off-campus organizations/entities; social media (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, dating apps); jobs/internships; support systems/spaces; community organizations?

Intersections:

- What identities do you hold that you would consider important to you?

- In what ways have your various identities informed your understanding of masculinity, generally or yours specifically?
 - a. How has your race/experiences with racism...? At your institution?
 - b. How has your sexuality/experiences with heterosexism...? At your institution?
 - c. How has your ability/disability status/experiences with ableism...? At your institution?
 - d. How has your socioeconomic status/experiences with classism...? At your institution?
 - e. How have any other identities/experiences with other forms of oppression...? At your institution?

Masculinity as Influencer:

- How has your masculinity or your experiences with masculinity influenced your life?
 - a. Your experiences as a student?
 - b. How you see yourself?
 - c. How you think others perceive you?
 - d. How you believe others treat you?
 - e. Your academic and/or career plans?
 - f. Opportunities you have pursued or chosen not to pursue?
 - g. Your relationships with family? Friends? Other peers? Potential dating/relationship partners/pursuits?
 - h. Your understanding of social justice/oppression/equity?
- In what ways, if any, has your masculinity or your experiences with masculinity changed your perspective?
 - a. On individuals, such as students/staff/faculty at your institution, friends/peers?
 - b. On campus policies?
 - c. On relationships? On intimacy/sex?
 - d. On gender?
 - e. On what is important to you?

Wrap-Up

- If you were to capture/describe your masculinity in one word, phrase, or image, what would that be?
- What would you say to a younger you, or a future you about masculinity?
- What, if anything, do you believe you have learned about yourself by participating in this focus group today?
- Is there anything you thought we would talk about today that we did not?
 - a. Would you like to share about that?

APPENDIX G
CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Trans*Masculine Students' Conceptions of Masculinity

Researcher(s): T.J. Jourian, PhD. Candidate, Loyola University Chicago (Principal Investigator)

Faculty Sponsor: Bridget Turner Kelly, Ph.D., Loyola University Chicago

Introduction:

You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by T.J. Jourian for part of his dissertation study under the supervision of Dr. Bridget Turner Kelly in the School of Education's Higher Education program at Loyola University Chicago.

You are being asked to participate because you are a current undergraduate or graduate student that self-identifies as trans*masculine in some way, including but not exclusively as transmale, female-to-male, boi, aggressive, stud, Two Spirit, or masculine-of-center.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to investigate how trans*masculine students understand, define, and adopt a masculine identity, and how that identity is informed by their various intersecting and salient identities.

Procedures:

[INTERVIEW] If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in an interview lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. The interview will be audio-taped and transcribed. The results of the interview will be used to better understand trans*masculine students' definitions of masculinity.

[FOCUS GROUP] If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. The focus group will be audio-taped and transcribed. The results of the focus group will be used to better understand trans*masculine students' definitions of masculinity.

Risks/Benefits:

There are minimal risks involved in participating in this research. For example, you may experience some discomfort responding to some of the questions.

There are no guaranteed benefits to you from participation, but data gathered from this study will help include the voices and experiences of trans*masculine students in the

literature on men and masculinities in higher education. Participation in the study also offers the opportunity to reflect on one's own journey, self-awareness, and identity.

Confidentiality:

- Your responses will be kept confidential by applying pseudonyms to all responses, in lieu of actual names, when recording and reporting the information.
- At no time will your participation in this research be revealed to anyone other than the researcher [FOCUS GROUP] and fellow focus group participants. Focus group participants are asked to respect other participants' confidentiality, however, this cannot be guaranteed by the researcher.
- The audio recordings will only be kept and heard by the researcher, and upon conclusion of the dissertation study will be destroyed.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact:

- T.J. Jourian at tjourian@luc.edu
- Or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Bridget Turner Kelly at bkelly4@luc.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Statement of Consent:

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

APPENDIX H
DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET

DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET

Pseudonym: _____ College/University: _____

Class: Undergraduate _____ Major(s): _____
Graduate _____

What words would you use to describe your:

Gender Identity: _____ Sexuality: _____

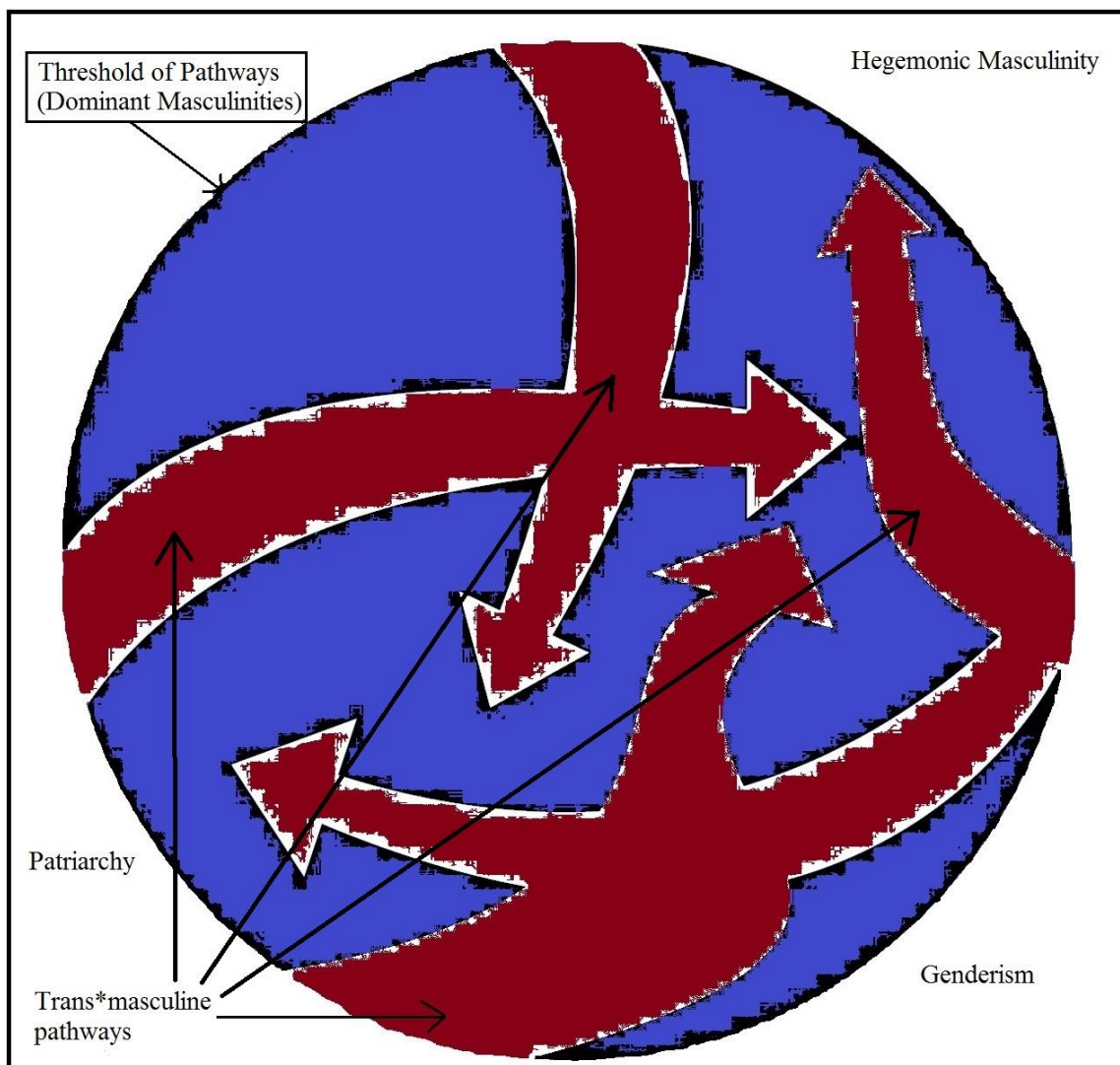
Race and/or ethnicity: _____ Class/SES: _____

Ability/disability status: _____

Other identities important to you:

APPENDIX I
TRANS*MASCULINE PATHWAYS

TRANS* MASCULINE PATHWAYS



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VITA

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