AMBIVALENT AFFILIATIONS:
BLACK AND WHITE GAY MEN'S DISCOURSES ON IDENTITY AND BELONGING

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The majority of work done on gay men's language in the United States has focused almost exclusively on white men, also tending to focus on phonetic qualities that allow others to identify the speaker as gay or on phonetic qualities that pattern along the lines of speaker sexuality. This dissertation expands on existing research by examining the speech of four white and four black young adult gay men in the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania area as they negotiate their gay identities in sociolinguistic interviews and group sessions.

Using discourse analysis to investigate the attitudes these men have toward homonormativity and gayness, I uncover their affiliations to a gay identity. In particular, I show how these men align with homonormative discourses about hypersexuality, coming-out, femininity, and the trajectory of a gay life. In their negative assessments of explicitly erotic activities like frequent casual sex and attempting to meet men for such activities in bars and through mobile applications, these men align themselves with the homonormative ideal of stable, couple-oriented monogamy. Examining dispreferred second-pair parts reveals their rejection of femininity as well as their familiarity with the coming-out story as an important communicative practice between gay men. Finally, I demonstrate that for this group of speakers in this particular context, there are no great differences in language use between black and white participants. I

comment on the implications for gay men of color and their inclusion in a broader, homonormative gay community.

This study problematizes the understanding of social categories as fixed and static and highlights the highly variable nature of identity affiliation and linguistic representations of this variability. Rather than attribute certain speech features to the speaker's identity, such as sex, class, or race, I show how speakers use language in the creation of their own identities and the interpretation of others' by negotiating the available discourses around what it means to be a homonormative gay man in America.

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1.0   INTRODUCTION

Work on varieties of English commonly associated with gay men has a long history but has recently exploded in number and foci of linguistic and anthropological research over the past two decades. The focus of these works has varied from lexemes specific to a community of gay men, and identifying speech patterns—often phonetic—that correlate with gay male identity, to the specific forms of discourse used by gay men in contexts dominated by gay men. To date, the vast majority of the existing research has as its focus American, white, cis-gendered, middle-class, urban gay men to the exclusion of other members of the numerous heterogeneous gay male communities present worldwide. While the present work cannot possibly aim to examine the language varieties of all men who might consider themselves gay, it takes as its focus a slightly broader subset of gay men for investigation.

To that end, this dissertation examines the language used by eight gay, cis-gendered (i.e., not trans-identified) men living in the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania region, four of which are white and four of which are black. The present project represents preliminary research into this ad hoc group of men, of which I am a member, lending the research a participant-ethnographic bent in its data collection and analysis. I recruited eight total participants for the study, none of whom knew each other before their participation. During the course of our one-on-one conversations and the two group conversations, these men used language to reflect, shape, and interpret their own and the others' identities as gay men in the Pittsburgh region by affiliating closely with

prominent national discourses about acceptable ways to be gay in the United States that have come to be called homonormativity.

In recruiting men of the two major racial groups present in the United States, my variationist sociolinguistics training is reflected in anticipating language use that will reflect these highly salient social categories. From my own experience, as well as that reflected in ubiquitous anecdotes and media representations, gay communities nationwide—but specifically in my personal experiences in south east Michigan, north Texas, and south west Pennsylvania—are typically racially homogenous, dominated by men who pass as white (no matter their "true" racial identity). Based on the assumption that language use reflects identity and communities of practice, my initial expectation was to encounter significant differences in language use among the white and black gay men. Examining these expected differences will begin to fill a gap in the extant sociolinguistic literature on language use by non-white gay men as well as problematize the misleading universal label "gay" and its application to men whose sexual partners may be male, but whose identities do not align with those of other identifiable gay men.

In this dissertation, I will demonstrate that these men reflect their subtle familiarity with homonormativity in order to associate their identities and practices with legitimate American gay male identity and in so doing, create community with one another in an artificially-constructed, brief social encounter with other gay men. I will examine their use of discourse features that reflect not only their depth of knowledge regarding homonormative identity features as they relate to beliefs about themselves, others, and the world at large, as well as how they relate to their own behaviors and perceptions of normal, expected, or deviant behavior.

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1.1   TERMINOLOGY

The present dissertation examines the language use of men whose identity is male and whose primary sexual and romantic partners also identify as male. As part of the screening procedures, I asked them if they were "gay" and all of the participants agreed that they were. But I must first be clear about how I will use the term in this work.

Legman's published "The Language of Homosexuality," in which he sought to "bring some provisional order out of chaos [by proposing] the following standard vocabulary" (1941, 1152). In addition to proposing a standard set of vocabulary to describe sexual practices for medical or psychological purposes (such explicit terms for the role of the penetrator and the penetrated in oral and anal sex with terms like: fellation vs. irrumation, and the pedicator vs. the pedicant), Legman defines homosexuality as "the generic term for sexual attraction to persons of the same rather than of the opposite sex." For the purposes of this dissertation, I will continue to use this term in a broad, generic sense to denote people who generally or habitually have sexual or romantic attractions to people of the same sex. In doing so, I recognize that there are many people who may be considered by some to engage in homosexuality who would not identify themselves as homosexual, for example, men who have sex with men (MSM) or same-sex identified men. I will draw a finer distinction between the broad term "homosexual" and the more specific and narrowly-defined (for my purposes) term "gay" which is problematic as most American English speakers commonly and primarily use it as a synonym for "homosexual."

The connection of the term "gay" to homosexuality is relatively new. For example, my parents report that this word was quite uncommon for them during their youths in south east Michigan; they would have used "queer" instead, which has its own complex history. Legman

also collected some slang vocabulary used by various groups of people such as the police, prisoners, and homosexuals. Among these, he provides the following definition for "gay":

> *__gay__ An adjective used almost exclusively by homosexuals to denote homosexuality, sexual attractiveness, promiscuity ("camped" as *promiscruity*, on *screw*, meaning to copulate), or lack of restraint, in a person, place, or party. Often given the French spelling, *gai* or *gaie* by (or in burlesque of) cultured homosexuals of both sexes. (1941, 1167)

Legman marks this entry with a single asterisk to indicate its use exclusively by homosexuals, but in 1975 Cory writes in the new forward to his original 1951 "The Homosexual in America: a Subjective Approach" that "[t]he word 'gay,' known to almost anyone with some degree of involvement with homosexuality, was entirely unknown to most Americans [in 1951], save in its conventional dictionary meaning" (7). Rodgers defines the word in his admittedly non-academic participant-observer publication "the Queens' Vernacular" thusly:

> __gay__   (fr 16th cent Fr gaie = homosexual man; cf Brit sl *gay* girl = whore) __1__. one who is homosexual. Sometimes used of only the active member of the homosexual community, ie one who speaks the slang, buys homophile literature, is homosexually sociable, etc "Gays march on Washington!" "Hate that gay? Blow it away!" __2__. (adj) homosexual; associated with homosexuality "Gay is as gay does!" "Blow Tilly a gay kiss!" Syn: __happy__ ("Tired of the run-of-the-mill numbers? Phone the Happy Miller at Exbrook 2254"); __jolly__.
> …
> __-dom__   homosexual subculture with respect to the standard norm "Julius Caesar was no stranger to ancient gaydom; he was a mad fuck to the King of Bythynia, at least." Syn: __gay life__[__world__] ("Little did he know that he took a giant step into the gay world when he became a fashion designer"); __gray world__ (the ungay world of the homosexual). … (1972, 93-94)

We can see from Cory's definition that by 1975 "gay" as a reference to homosexual men had moved outside the exclusive use of homosexual men and was in broader use by non-homosexuals as well. Rodgers' definition is interesting because it adds a focus to the word away from a description of sexual desire or activity to social activity. He reports its use as sometimes referring to someone active in "the homosexual community," which reinforces social bonds

between men of a like identity. The entry for "gaydom," presumably making use of the bound morpheme "-dom" in words like "kingdom" and "Christendom" to describe a geographic area of influence or rule, refers to a metaphoric space within a broader culture. In the synonym for this word, Rodgers references a well-known stereotype of gay men as involved in aesthetic pursuits such as fashion, hair-styling, or theatre.

All of this is to say that the overlaps and differences between "homosexual" and "gay" is not always clear or consistent from speaker to speaker. In this dissertation, I use "gay" to refer to a specific subset of homosexual men—those who identify publicly as both men whose primary sexual and romantic attraction is to other men as well as those men who consider themselves members of a community of men who share in common their sexuality and certain (sub)cultural practices. Not all of these gay men are homonormative (which I discuss in chapter 2) and when this is the case I am explicit in explaining this.

1.2   BACKGROUND

This dissertation project began, as do so many long-term research projects, with a set of assumptions about the data to be collected and analyzed, and hypotheses about the data's interpretations and implications for the community under investigation and the field within which the research is situated.

The original goal of this research was born out of the realization of a nigh-exclusive focus on white gay men within the broadly-named field of "language and sexuality." White, gay men feature prominently in American popular culture. A sea change has occurred in American media, especially television, since the mid-nineties. This change in media representations of gay

men is often traced to perhaps the first popular and visible representation of gay men in *Will & Grace*, a television sit-com that brought two (largely positive) prominent representations of gay men into American living rooms perhaps for the first time. Since then (and to some degree, even before *Will & Grace*), network television has featured numerous gay male characters; there is even a successful sit-com airing currently titled *Modern Family* that features a gay male couple who are parents to an adopted child. Representations of gay men are not limited to sit-coms; they abound in films both blockbuster and independent, reality television (both as contestants and judges), pop music, etc. Add to this the ever-growing attention paid to non-heterosexual people in the political landscape, as states and the country grapple with legal issues related to same-sex couples and the employment of LGBT individuals in the private and public—especially military—sectors. Gay men, in short, feature prominently in popular culture and have become part of the cultural landscape.

With very few exceptions, gay men as represented on television, and arguably, as represented in the cultural imagination of many Americans, are white, urban, upwardly mobile, middle-class, cisgendered (people whose gender and sex align in culturally normed and expected ways; compare with transgendered) men. Crucially for this dissertation, the vast majority of the existing literature of gay men's speech similarly has as its core white, urban, middle-class, cisgendered men. Little is known about the ways that language intersects with sexuality for gay men who are non-white, non-urban, or non-middle-class. Sociolinguistic research over the past several decades has uncovered the myriad ways that speech differs across communities of geography, urbanity, race/ethnicity, and class. There is no reason that the speech of gay men should not exhibit parallel differences but this fact has not been given ample discussion in the existing literature on language as used by gay men.

It is this gap in both descriptive and theoretical literature regarding gay men of color that this dissertation sought out to address. Examining a population of gay English speakers who embody the proper concatenation of social identities to flesh out the knowledge of the broad variety of speech evinced by gay men constitutes a life's work, and so here I aimed to address only the issue of race or ethnicity, leaving issues of geography, urbanity, cisgenderedness, and class to future work and other researchers.

Now, near the completion of this phase of the project, I have come to realize that the questions I was really asking had more to do with the language use of a particular set of men in a particular setting. While I will address the language use of these particular men, my conclusions cannot provide answers about white or black gay men's language use that can be generalized to other regions or populations. But they can add to the knowledge we have about how language can be mobilized in a particular setting by particular speakers to the end of facilitating communication with one another and building social ties, however temporary they may be. They can shed light on the influence of dominant popular discourses, like homonormativity, on language use at a local level. In examining how men create identities, represent themselves to others, and interact with one another, I can draw conclusions about how homonormativity shapes language and how language reflects and reifies homonormativity.

With this background information in mind, I now turn to the research questions that guide the present work:

> (a) How is language used to construct these speakers' gay identities in conversation?

(b) How does speaker knowledge of what it means to be gay influence the speaker's production of his own speech and his interpretation of other's speech?

(c) How might these black and white speakers engage in the two aforementioned activities differently?

In answering these questions, I employ discourse analysis to uncover the specifics of language as these men use it in their discussions of themselves, their communities, and others. A person's identity is not a static entity, but rather dynamic. It shifts according to the needs of the temporal and situational context. For example, when the participants recount their coming-out stories, their gay identities are particularly foregrounded and they take affiliating stances toward me as a fellow gay man and toward the coming-out process as a positive event in their lives. Within the context of sharing coming-out stories, being gay is highly salient and is reflected in the language choices that these men take.

As the men talk about themselves, they make positive and negative assessments about certain phenomena present in broad discourses about gay men. Thus, examining the kinds of phenomena that are expected to be familiar to the speaker and the listener, as well as investigating the underlying stereotypes about gayness that inform language choice allows me to determine what elements of gayness are particularly salient for these men. Demonstrating which aspects of gayness are meaningful, either in their uptake or their rejection, results in a more nuanced view of the ways that identity is dialogic, dynamic, and selectively reflective.

Finally, I examine the third of my research questions which asks whether there is a difference in the aforementioned language uses among the black and white men in this study.

2.0   LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section I will outline the two main bodies of research that have informed this dissertation: work in sociolinguistics and anthropology on language and sexuality, and work in various fields informed by queer theory on gay men's identity and social position in the United States.

The former loose collection of research will give a brief overview of the development of language and sexuality research, as well as outline the two largest viewpoints on this question in contemporary research. In this sub-section, I will show how a variety of linguistic phenomena have been examined with an eye toward identifying their place in gay men's speech patterns and in the abilities of others to identify a man's sexuality based on his speech.

The second major part of this literature review will be concerned with the question of homonormativity, closely related to heteronormativity, which describes the hegemonic discourses that define the core of gay men's acceptability in the United States by aligning them as slight variants on the dominant social theme of largely white and middle-class, stable, monogamous couple-hood aimed at the perpetuation of the nuclear family arranged around child-rearing and consumerism. It is essential to understand homonormativity because it is a dominant force in American gay and homosexual lives, and because it undergirds the identities that the participants in this study presented.

2.1   LANGUAGE AND SEXUALITY

The study of the speech of homosexual men has a relatively long history, including, at least in the U.S., Legman's 1941 "The Language of Homosexuality: An American Glossary." Legman compiled some slang or jargon items from the 1930s and 1940s used by homosexual men in the U.S. Similar work was undertaken in subsequent decades (for another example, see Bruce Rodgers' 1972 "The Queens' Vernacular"), but not until the 1990s did research begin in earnest to examine other characteristics of homosexual men's speech outside the lexicon.

Recently, sociolinguistic scholarship has often focused on phonetic characteristics of speech that are either produced by homosexual and/or gay men or perceived to have been produced by gay men. I and others have chosen to call this phenomenon "gay-sounding speech." The advantage to this sometimes cumbersome term is that it avoids the kinds of essentializing generalizations inherent in discussions of broad, internally heterogeneous groups, such as the now common critiques of labels like African American (Vernacular) English and Women's English. Clearly, not all gay-identified men sound gay and there are certainly those who sound gay but do not identify as such. Furthermore, uncritical application of these descriptors creates fallacies of homogeneity. Although those men who consider themselves gay may have some linguistic characteristics in common, more recent inquiry has challenged the tacit assumption that all men who could be considered gay (by whatever idiosyncratic definitions that may be presented) have some linguistic of other characteristics in common.

This assumption that there is a gay voice or accent is a common one among laypeople as well. At the museum gift store of the Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, I encountered a mouth spray featuring an illustration of two, young men sharply dressed in clothing reminiscent of the 50s. The pink cardboard packaging advertised this peppermint flavored mouth

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spray (Jesus Had a Sister Productions) as "instant Gay Accent." Clearly a gag gift, the back continued the description of the so-called gay accent. "Our patented Extreme Voice Enhancing_{TM} formula instantly puts the sizzle in your 's's, tightens your 't's, and perfectly pinches your lips for pristine pronunciation." The packaging draws attention explicitly by naming the consonants, but also through the alliteration of the descriptors to the pronunciation of /s/, /t/, /p/. Adding further to stereotypes of gay-sounding individuals and the lives they lead, the packaging comes complete with a faux testimonial delivered by a man in a velvet smoking jacket with the pseudonym "Silvio Juan de Fuca":

> For years I had dreamed of penetrating the exclusive world of *__haute couture__* fashion, but no one took me seriously. In desperation, my wife suggested I try instant Gay AccentTM spray, a patented voice changing formula. That was 25 years ago. Since then, I've created several well-received women's collections, guest- starred in a successful 'home exercise' video for men… while working part-time as an airline steward. Going gay got me through the door. And if I can sound gay, honey, anybody can! (back panel, original emphasis)

This testimonial reads like a laundry list of gay stereotypes, starting with a desire to work in high fashion, moving to prêt-à-porter design, a nod to soft-core pornography, and finally ending on flight attendant. Furthermore, this testimonial is rife with sexual innuendo, from his dreams "of *penetrating* the exclusive world of **haute couture**" (italics are my emphasis, bold font in the original), to the deliberately ambiguous claim that "*going gay* got [him] through the door." (italics are my emphasis). This latter statement reminds one of the often lampooned assertion that "once you go black, you don't go back," referring to one's choice of black sexual partners permanently setting a person's preference. Getting "through the door" may be a metaphorical reference to his entry into the fashion, home exercise video, or flight attendant industries; or it can also be read as a veiled reference to anal sex, which is closely and sometimes exclusively associated with homosexual men. The only stereotype missing here is either a hair stylist or a

florist. It ends, fittingly, with the vocative *honey*, which could only come out of the mouth of a gay man (client of this mouth spray, it seems) or a woman.

While the above artifact presents an amusing example of some of the stereotypes broadly available regarding gay men, it is important to recognize that stereotypes of dress, behavior, and language rarely capture the intra-speaker variation present. Simple variationist investigations of a supposedly monolithic gay men's speech not only ignore intra-group variation, but also intra-speaker variation. Podesva's (2007) work on phonation type highlights the dynamic nature of speech, associating relatively more or less gay-sounding ways of speaking with setting, interlocutor, and topic for just a single-speaker—broadly: context. Instead, "gay-sounding" sidesteps messy considerations of speaker identity and politics. It focuses on the perception of speech as indexing a certain characteristics. Leap touches on the kinds of elements under consideration here:

> I am interested in the *stereotypic* [my emphasis] varieties of Gay English: for example, the catty, bitchy dialogue associated with Matt Crowley's *Boys in the Band*; the self-absorbed linguistic play during "cruising"; and the code words that confirm gay identity during informal conversations between strangers in public places. (1996, xi)

Leap's insistence on the stereotypic nature of the ways in which some gay men speak is important. It is the public acknowledgement of this speech variety that is so often under investigation.

Attempts to isolate gay(-sounding) characteristics have resulted in a constellation of features purported to correlate or index gay speakers, such as vowel quality (Munson et al. 2006b, Piccolo 2008, Pierrehumbert et al. 2004, Zimman 2011), phonation type (Podesva 2007), sibilant quality (Smyth et al. 2003, Levon 2006), fricative quality (Munson et al. 2006a), intonation contours and pitch range (Gaudio 1994, Leap 1996, Levon 2006, Zimman 2011), stop

releases and voice onset time (Piccolo 2008, Smyth and Rogers 2003), and voice quality and nasality (Podesva 2007, Zimman 2011). Other avenues of inquiry have continued the investigations on lexicon and pragmatics, particularly as they overlap characteristics of other minority communities' speech, such as African American speech (Barrett 1999) and white, middle-class women's speech (Lakoff and Bucholtz 2004, Leap 1996).

Despite the robust examination of the phonetic features of gay speech (that is, speech produced by gay men, whether it is perceived to be gay-sounding or not) and of gay-sounding speech (speech perceived to be gay-sounding, whether the speaker is gay or not), consensus is not easily found. Some researchers have found vowel quality to be important in determining the identification of gay-sounding speech (Piccolo 2008) while others have found a lack of significant correlation (Pierrehumbert et al. 2004). Stop-release has been found to be significant in some investigations (Smyth and Rogers 2002) but not in others (Piccolo 2008).

Pitch contours are equally problematic. I make a point of asking undergraduate classes that I have contact with either through teaching, TAing, or guest lecturing, what are some of the linguistic elements of gay-sounding speech. My aim in this is to gain an anecdotal understanding of folk notions regarding gay-sounding speech. Answers related to pitch contours are ubiquitous in every discussion I have, and this salience is not lost on language and sexuality researchers. Gaudio's 1994 investigation of intonation over a read passage yielded mixed results, indicating that intonation can be instrumental in identifying gay-sounding speakers, but only when combined with other phonetic and cultural factors. Levon's 2006 project sought to digitally control the variability of intonation (and sibilant duration), the former of which was left to individual-speaker variation in Gaudio's study. Levon concluded importantly that pitch range

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digitally made more dynamic alone was not enough for naïve participants to identify a speech sample as gay-sounding. He writes:

> I am not claiming that sibilant duration and pitch range play no part in listeners' assessments of a speaker's sexuality… These two variables, pitch range and sibilant duration, when presented alone with all else remaining constant were insufficient to alter listeners' perceptions of the sexuality of the speaker. Further research is required to identify which features or combinations of features would do so. And the only way to determine which features and combinations of features come together to index gayness for listeners is to continue conducting experiments that isolate specific linguistic variables and test these variables in the manner discussed here. (69)

Addressing the difficulty in isolating the component features of gay-sounding speech, Levon wonders whether gay-sounding speech may be a gestalt phenomenon—one in which the gay-sounding speech cannot be accurately described in terms of its component variants.

There are additional benefits to the consideration of gay-sounding speech as opposed to gay speech. Gay-men's speech focuses on a speech variety that is assumed to be inherent in men whose identity is gay; it presupposes a natural connection between sexual desire and public identity. If the term "gay" specifically refers to a personal relationship between a couple, for example, how has it come to include references not just to sexual practices, but also references to social practices? Why are gay men understood to be fashionable and interested in décor? Sexuality is an area of inquiry that includes more than just sexual practice—it is sexual identity.

While there has been a proliferation of work examining the phonetic aspects of both gay-sounding speech as well as gay-speech, there is also a robust literature of discursive linguistic practices relevant to gay speakers. Leap (1996) identified cooperative discourse as one important aspect of the ways in which gay men use language amongst themselves. In his discussion of two gay men interacting in a department store, Leap gives an example of this cooperative discourse, which relies on both parties to actively seek and construct common meaning. When the customer

inquires about the sale prices of a set of sweatshirts, the salesperson indicates that they are not on sale. He then suggests that another sweatshirt, indicating a lavender one, would look nice on the customer. The customer agrees, saying that he owns several already, and the interaction ends with shared grins. It is only through understanding the significance of the color lavender as historically representing LG(BT) persons that the many meanings become apparent. The two men were revealing their sexual identities to one another via coded cultural signs; that this interaction was successful is suggested in their shared smiles. This cooperative principle has come to be revisited in other discussions of gay and lesbian interactions.

Morrish and Sauntson (2007) demonstrate this same cooperation in conversation in their analysis of a conversation taking place between three lesbian women watching television. They begin to joke about making a lesbian version of a home improvement show in which groups of friends make over each other's homes. They laugh about telling the audience about their cats instead of their children and how they'd have strict rules against pastels. Again, the success of this conversation (as reflected in the laughter and enthusiastic participation) hinges on knowledge of stereotypes surrounding lesbians: they have cats and they abhor typically feminine aesthetics such as pastel colors. This kind of referencing is important to note; as the participants recognize existing stereotypes about their sexuality, they align themselves with those identities.

Here it merits reminding that the terms *homosexual* and *gay* in this dissertation are not synonymous as they are often used elsewhere. The former describes the sexual orientation of a person, the predilection for same-sex love and romance, but says nothing about the person's appearance, mannerisms, behavior, social network, etc. It may be thought of as akin to the term often used in public health and medical literature: men who have sex with men (MSM). MSM, or homosexual men, may not necessarily identify as gay, which has connotations of white, middle-

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class urban communities that are often highly visible via television, music, and gay parades. This is not to say that MSM don't form long-term partnerships with other men (who may or may not identify as gay themselves), but that their public, social identities are not wrapped up in public displays of gay identity. The latter term, *gay*, calls to mind the oft-repeated but little defined phrases "gay lifestyle." *Gay* is the social identity that arises in connection to a person's identification as a member of a community of men whose most significant sexual and romantic partners are other men (although *gay* is sometimes used to refer to both men and women, I am only able to address the issues of language and sexuality as they relate to men). A predilection for the arts, pop music, musicals, the arts, and other aesthetic-oriented activities that is so often associated with gay men has nothing to do with male-male same-sex activity, but these identities have come to be associated with one another.

Deborah Cameron and Don Kulick speak directly to this distinction in the 2003 book "Language and Sexuality." Their focus is on the language of desire (sexual practice) as well as the language of sexuality (sexual identity). Although their focus on desire, which they identify as specific and internal to an individual, has been heavily critiqued, they are accurate in problematizing previous conceptualizations of language varieties associated with gay men, for example, as being essentialist, ignoring the fact that gay men speak in varied ways just as straight men do. A tight focus on one aspect of language production and its association with a sexual identity (gay men's language) is overly narrow for Cameron and Kulick; it ignores the broad range of variability and deliberateness in language production. In this, Cameron and Kulick echo Judith Butler's (2006) conceptualization of gender (and indeed every identity) as performed; gender is no more an inherent quality of a person than nationality. It is not because a person is feminine that she wears makeup and walks in high heels, but it is in wearing makeup and

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walking in high heels that she becomes feminine, that she takes on cultural notions of femininity and enacts them; she performs her femininity. Gender is performed daily through action and thought and as it is performed successfully and unsuccessfully, it becomes hegemonic in its cyclicity. Femininity is performed as it is simply because people who are understood to be feminine perform their gender in this way, and then in performing their gender in a feminine fashion they recreate action as feminine, feminine as identity, identity as action, and so on.

These works and the questions they pose (and answer) bring me to one of the central questions of this project: how does speaking in a way associated with gayness help to reinforce their identities and behaviors? I am also interested in the ways that people who seek to temporarily index such an identity make judicious use of these resources in order to cue the proper interpretation of their performance (both literal and Butlerian).

Crucially, a person's sexual identity (gay, straight, bi, trans, slut, queer, etc.) may or may not affect his or her speech in every utterance. Just because a person considers himself male and is in the habit of having sexual intercourse with another person who considers himself male doesn't mean that his ordering a pizza over the telephone will include some cues to his sexual identity. It is more likely that his identity as a regular customer of that particular pizza restaurant will affect his speech when making this order (for example, he may use the name of the employee on the phone even when not provided, he may ask for "the usual," etc.). Similarly and on the other hand, his sexual partners would likely find it confusing if he reflected his identity as a regular at this pizza joint when talking about the sex they have.

Furthermore, notions of what kinds of speech make up gay or straight talk are resources for use broadly across the social spectrum by individuals who may or may not ascribe to these identity labels. A person may choose to speak in a way that is understood to be gay even if he

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doesn't identify as gay. To continue with the example of the gay pizza aficionado from above, we might see his roommate adopting the same speech features when ordering a pizza, even if he is not a regular himself, perhaps for the purposes of securing a discount or better service. Equally as important, the relationship between the resources employed in the performance of an identity and that identity is not always one-to-one. Morrish and Sauntson put it this way:

> The argument that those who identify as gay, may not sound gay (Kulick 2000: 60), and similarly, that structures that might be identified as gay on some occasions might wittingly or unwittingly be used by straight people, is what, to use an analogy from phoneme theory, came to be known as the biuniqueness question, i.e. if a phone was assigned to a phoneme on one occasion, it would always belong to that phoneme. It doesn't work for phonology, and it certainly doesn't work in the complex world of human interaction where conditions of register, style, audience, performativity, materiality all pervade the context of communication. Moreover, in the field of experimental phonetics, the search for invariance and uniqueness was abandoned a long time ago, and we should not wish to see its resurrection in the guise of language about queer sexuality. (2007, 21)

The speech employed by gay men (or any other group, for that matter) need not make use of linguistic resources that are explicitly unique to their group; rather the use and understanding of these features can be where the reflection of identity is found. Morrish and Leap put it another way: "The concern [of studies on language and sexuality] was much more complex: tracing how speakers' use of language 'at the site' conveys context- and culture-specific messages about sexual identity and other topics related to sexuality *within the social moment*, and thereby, demonstrating how certain linguistic practices convey messages about sexuality within that cultural setting" (2007, 17, original emphasis).

Cameron and Kulick (2003) crucially acknowledge the relationship between representations of sex and sexuality, and the realities of their performances. "The two sets of questions, how sexuality is 'done' and how it is represented, are connected, because

representations are a resource people draw on—arguably, indeed, are compelled to draw on—in constructing their own identities and ways of doing things." (12)

Here Cameron and Kulick indicate that the representations that act as resources drawn on by people are used not just by gays (in the case of gay-sounding speech), but by all members of society. These representations can be used by those who wish to construct such an identity, by those who are maintaining it, but also by those who seek to construct a different identity. Individuals are defined both by what they are and what they are not, so that in the case of a heterosexual man performing and constructing his identity, it is important to know what is and is not connected to appropriate behaviors for himself.

2.2   HOMONORMATIVITY

Jasbir Puar, in her 2006 article "Mapping US Homonormativities" sums up the question of homonormativity succinctly: "Yet it is certainly the case that within a national as well as transnational frame, some queers are better than others" (71). Which queers, then, are acceptable over others forms the heart of discussions around homonormativity, a term derived from heteronormativity: hegemony that reinforces tacit assumptions and privileging of "truths" regarding sex, gender, sexuality, and how these influence a person's "lifestyle."

To put it shortly, heteronormativity is the privileging of a belief in binaries of sex (male and female), gender (masculine and feminine), their natural mappings (male and masculine, female and feminine), and the assumption or expectation that all people will fit neatly into these patterns. Not only will one man pair off with one woman, but this pair will enter in a socially-

sanctioned institution of marriage with one of the purposes being the production of children through heterosexual reproduction.

But heteronormativity has implications beyond the bodies, gender presentations, and sexualities of people; it also explains various seemingly unrelated phenomena from parents praising large feet in male infants ("He'll be an athlete!") to the phenomena in Kitzinger's (2005) analysis of phone calls on behalf of a sick person to an after-hours medical service. In her analysis, both those calling for advice about a friend or family member and the health care professionals who staff the phone line reflect in their speech their normative views of family as biological, living in the same house, governmentally-sanctioned, and of course heterosexual. When callers identify the sick person as a husband or wife, the conversation continues uninterrupted to questions relevant to diagnosis; but when the relationship between caller and patient is indicated to be one of boyfriend or neighbor, the discussion first must include some additional information to explain the caller's authority to call on behalf of the sick person. Heteronormativity leads people to expect that, among other things, husbands and wives will have privileged access to intimate details about their spouses, and that they have the ethical and legal authority to discuss this information with a physician.

Behavior that deviates from heteronormative scripts is socially castigated. Although the social consequences of never marrying may be more severe for women than men, both are often viewed with suspicion and discussions often require an explanatory comment about why Aunt Gin, for example, never married. In contrast, married people are almost never asked to explain why they chose to marry instead of stay single; the default assumption is that a person will marry at an appropriate point in his or her life to an appropriate partner.

Up until recently, homosexuality was a serious deviation of heteronormative scripts as is evident from the legal consequences of pursuing homosexual activities or relationships. But with the rise in acceptance of homosexuality and people publicly pursuing homosexual relationships, there has arisen a newer script that licenses certain kinds of non-heterosexual pairing. Unlike heteronormativity which reflects the assumption that all people are either a masculine male or feminine female and that each is interested romantically and sexually in the other, homonormativity is instead a "new neo-liberal sexual politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (Duggan 2002, 179). This is to say that homonormativity allows homosexual relationships so long as they are restricted to couples who are non-activist, domestic, and consumerist—in short, same-sex couples that resemble heterosexual couples in all but sex.

Homonormativity represents the ability for homosexual men and women to gain broader societal acceptance in an unprecedented way; where previously two men in a long term relationship may have only had very local and private recognition of their relationship among the very closest of friends and family (if at all), homonormative gay men now enjoy ever-increasing levels of acceptance in contemporary American society. With increased societal acceptance have come more formal legal benefits—perhaps foremost in the American eye at the moment, the ability to marry a partner of the same sex in some jurisdictions in the country. Homonormativity has carved a place on the collective American mantle for wedding photos of a young, smiling couple of men or women in many places.

But homonormativity is not without its critics. Like heteronormativity, homonormativity licenses only certain behaviors by certain people in certain situations. Opposition to same-sex marriage by LGBT people is not uncommon. A recent article in the Style section of the New York Times (Buckley, 2013) featured several same-sex couples who had the legal option to marry but chose not to; much like the aforementioned straight man or woman who might be expected to explain his or her choice not to marry, the same expectations have now come to be laid upon gay men and women. Further, same-sex marriage has been critiqued as an extension of an existing institution based on discrimination, particularly against poor people for whom many of the benefits conferred by marriage are inaccessible to begin with: employer-sponsored health insurance benefits for a spouse, property inheritance, etc.

Buckley (2013, 2) quotes an unmarried gay man and professor of gender and women's studies as saying marriage, both for heterosexual and homosexual couples, "is elitist, and was championed by more-affluent gay men and lesbians who wanted cultural approval and the bourgeoisie rewards of marriage." Homonormativity holds affluent couples up as virtuous examples of a life well led.

Jasbir Puar (2006) argues that homonormativity has as its primary characteristics whiteness, masculinity (for men), athleticism, Americanism and patriotism, family-orientation, and importantly, consumerism. In examining advertising aimed at gay and lesbian tourists, Puar asserts that advertisements promise that via personal consumption, homosexuals can expect full inclusion as Americans. Her 2002 article "Circuits of Queer Mobility" takes a closer look at advertising aimed at gay and lesbian Americans and, while somewhat dated, offers a clear picture of the consumer that is targeted and supported by successful businesses in America.

The gay market is particularly attractive to marketers because of its historical surplus of DINKs (dual-income, no kids) with large amounts of disposable income. Puar cites a survey of the gay and lesbian market in 1992 in which educational attainment and median income are much higher than the national average (2002, 109). According to this survey, gays and lesbians travel more often and have more money to spend when they travel, making them an enticing market for travel companies. My point, and Puar's as well, is not to say that all men who have sex with men are middle-class, but rather that this study takes its respondents to be representative of "gay" travelers. In fact, 88% of the participants in the survey had college degrees, 94% were men, and although the survey did not report on ethnicity, it is not unlikely that the vast majority of the respondents were white.

Whatever certain contemporary gay men's travel habits may be, Puar makes some important points. The first is that the people who constitute gayness as understood by these marketers are predominantly white and middle- or upper-middle-class men, to the exclusion of people of color or working class people. Secondly, these gay men are active consumers within American society. Indeed, homonormative gayness is more than just sexual or romantic attraction between two men.

> While it is predictable that the claiming of queer space is lauded as the disruption of heterosexual space, rarely is this disruption seen as a disruption of racialized, gendered, and classed spaces, nor is it seen in tandem with a claiming of class, gender, and racial privilege as well. The term *gay ghetto*, for example, is an awkward, troubling appropriation of an urban metaphor most closely associated with racial communities, particularly since gay neighborhoods in no way resemble, in class or commodification practices, the impoverished, demonized spaces of ethnic enclaves. (2002, 112)

Thus we see that homonormativity is a script that licenses specific ways of being gay. If a homosexual man is white, likes to shop and travel, and is interested primarily in pairing with one other man to form a stable couple or family, he may count himself a member of American

society. Homonormativity admits only a select few to its exclusive club. And while it may seem that those who do not seek broad societal acceptance for their identities or relationships may simply opt out of homonormativity and reject it, they must confront it time and again in nearly any discussion. In writing about the relevance of heteronormativity to linguistics research, Motschenbacher writes:

> Heteronormativity must be repeatedly displayed through a person's life, especially by people who self-identify as heterosexuals. The mere avoidance of such constructions may lead to marginalization. This makes heteronormativity a discursively produced pressure that requires everybody to position oneself in relation to it on a daily basis. For non-heterosexual people, the pressure has far-reaching consequences that have repercussions through their lives: from hiding their identity to repeated coming outs in diverse contexts, from their own personal struggle to fight with heteronormatively structure institutions (e.g. family, school, law, the church, the military). (2011, 158)

The same can be said for homonormativity and non-homonormative gay men, with the addition that perhaps they find themselves in a double-bind. On the one hand, they are constantly confronted with their non-heteronormativity and must make decisions on visibility and disclosure whenever an assumption is made about their life choices. And on the other hand, identification as gay, homosexual, or even "not straight" will then thrust them into the homonormative arena where their choice not to marry a long-time partner, or not to choose a single partner in lieu of two or more, must be disclosed or not, explained or not, and justified against the predominant practice.

In this section I have outlined the main elements of homonormativity as it operates within a broad and fairly decontextualized American cultural sphere. Homonormativity dictates that homosexual men, if they seek broader acceptance, must play by certain rules which restrict them to behaviors that mirror traditional heteronormativity with the exception that both partners in a

couple will be of the same sex instead of different sexes. I turn now to the analytic frameworks that inform my discourse analysis.

2.3   ASSESSMENTS

The first of the two elements of speech that I will analyze are assessments, a phenomenon by which speakers and their interlocutors "evaluat[e] in some fashion persons and events being described within their talk" (Goodwin and Goodwin 1987, 1). Goodwin and Goodwin, in their 1987 article on assessments, go on to describe assessments as sometimes linguistic segments but at other times may include paralinguistic and extralinguistic phenomena such as intonation or gestures, respectively.

Goodwin's (2003) treatment of assessments highlights the importance of cultural knowledge in the appropriate interpretation of assessments. For example, in a basic assessment such as "My mother is a good cook," it is imperative to understand the general role of mothers and cooking in order to appropriately understand the assessment. Within the context of two restaurant employees discussing the restaurant's cook, who also happens to be one mother to one of said employees, the assessment *good* here changes its meaning from what it might otherwise connote in a discussion between two friends or acquaintances.

In the first example, a mother who is a "good cook" might be skilled at preparing foods that taste good, particularly while adhering to a family budget and ensuring as much nutritional value as possible. Her cooking goodness might not be related to how quickly she prepares food. In the second example, the restaurant employee who is also a mother might embody a different kind of "goodness" as cook; she prepares food successfully that the restaurant patrons enjoy, but

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her skill is not necessarily nutritional (as evidenced by her cavalier use of butter, perhaps). In contrast to the home cook, her ability to quickly prepare food is essential to the ability of the kitchen to support quick turnover in tables and ensuring a higher total number of customers served. Quantity might be an important focus for a good restaurant cook. Her skill as a good cook might also extend to her managerial prowess in a restaurant kitchen, managing the various other employees that work in the kitchen.

While any home cook who produces quick, abundant, rich food by skillfully managing other people in the kitchen would not likely be called a "bad cook," the kinds of skills associated with being a good home cook are likely different than those associated with being a good restaurant cook. Thus, it is essential that the participants in talk have an understanding of the context in which assessments are made in order to properly understand them. Specifically, Goodwin writes that the ability "to properly identify [that which is assessed] is one of the things that establishes within the talk of the moment a participant's competence, and indeed membership (or nonmembership) in a specific culture." (2003, 11-12).

Goodwin and Goodwin underline the importance of aligning assessments in interaction in their description of two car aficionados discussing an acquaintance restoring some cars. The two speakers, Mike and Curt, disagree about what constitutes a beautiful or remarkable car. As Curt describes the restored 1932 Oldsmobile with words like "so beautiful I couldn't believe it" (1987, 45) and repeating the adjective "original" twice, Mike's response is to simple nod without saying anything and to break eye contact with Curt for an extended period of time. Goodwin and Goodwin say that these disagreements in assessing represent not just for discovering the ability to make fine grain distinctions between objects to be assessed, "but a social and interactive

process, and indeed one that can have real consequences for the standing participants achieve vis-à-vis one another" (47).

2.4   DISPREFERRED SECOND-PAIR PARTS

Dispreferred second-pair parts constitute another essential component of the discourse analysis. These occur in talk when a speaker feels compelled to give a face-threatening response, such as refusing a request, offer, or invitation. Other dispreferred responses include disagreeing, offering an unexpected answer to a question, or admitting blame. All of these activities carry some social stigma in general. For example, refusing a reasonable request from a friend or acquaintance may indicate a lack of trust, generosity, or benevolence.

Speakers employ myriad resources to mitigate the potential face-threatening act of giving a dispreferred response. Robinson and Bolden (2010, 502) lists some of these methods as: silence, "turn pre-beginning conduct (e.g. breathing, *uhm*, etc…)," expressing appreciation or apology, and disclaiming knowledge or authority to speak. Tanaka (2008, 492) adds to the potential resources for delaying a dispreferred response with "repair initiators such as partial repeats and requests for clarification," or offering first a modified agreement followed by the agreement. For the latter, we might imagine a discussion between two people on politics in which the first person expresses a strong dislike for the current president's actions and the second person responds first with a weak agreement and then his disagreement: "I don't like everything he's done, but I still think he's made some good decisions."

Tanaka (2008, 493) provides a helpful table of example items used to delay dispreferred responses, separated into three categories: adverbials (such as *actually* and *if*), discourse markers (e.g. *listen* and *I'll tell you*), and epistemic expressions (*I think* and *it looks like*).

However, in addition to delaying the inevitable production of a dispreferred pair part, they may also preview it and thus allow the other speaker to repair the first-part part that initiated this potentially threatening second-pair part. "[H]esitations and other means of marking a dispreferred response can provide a source for a first speaker to revise the original first pair-part in such a way as to try to avoid disagreement or rejection" (Hutchby and Wooffitt 2008, 48).

These dispreferred pair parts can be instrumental in examining the affiliations between participants. For example, if I ask another gay man about his coming-out and he is unwilling to share it with me, he may utilize some of these resources in order to delay or prevent his having to refuse or even provide an unexpected or unwanted response to my request.

3.0   METHODOLOGY

This research project finds its basis in discourse analysis, but such an analysis relies significantly on knowledge gained similarly to that in a participant-ethnographic project. Given that I, like the participants in this study, identify as a gay man living in Pittsburgh and have grown up in the United States, I share many of the sociocultural experiences and backgrounds that are so fundamental to understanding the language of these participants.

Based on the language use that I have documented here, I examine the ways that these speakers construct their own gay identities in conversation. I am interested in the language choices they make, consciously or not, in talking about themselves, their communities, their social realities, and others. Furthermore, I am interested in what their specific language choices reveal about these aforementioned phenomena. To give a very basic example, these men responded affirmatively to my questions about identifying as "gay" men. What I mean to say here is that given that my recruitment materials specified that potential participants be "gay men" and that they never used any other words to refer to themselves (e.g., "trans," "transman," "queer," or "homosexual"), I can make (relatively safe) assumptions about the gender identities of the participants and their romantic or sexual partners that they want to present to me and others in the study. As I delve deeper into their language choices, I am able to describe more specifically the ways that these men interact with other gay men, with members of gay communities, and with others outside those communities.

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In examining these language choices, I am able to draw conclusions about the participants' individual or collective understandings of what it means to be gay and how these understandings influence not just each individual's speech, but the way he interprets the others' speech. To give another elementary example, hearing from another gay man that he and an acquaintance "sit in the same pew at church" allows me to understand this phrase as an identification of the acquaintance as also gay. Because I know that we are both gay allows me to interpret his phrase differently than I might if my straight, church-going father uttered it. I pursue a more detailed analysis of these comments and their interpretation in the analysis of this dissertation.

Finally, I seek to determine whether there are significant differences in the language use of the black and white gay men in this study. Sociolinguistics has long documented the ways that language use varies among American speakers by race although this same variation has not been robustly documented among gay male speakers of different races, probably due to a paucity of research on non-white gay men's speech. My own personal impressions of the gay community in Pittsburgh as well as in south east Michigan and north Texas is that they are racially quite homogeneous, despite the racial heterogeneity of the urban centers themselves. Media representations of gay men tend to be similarly exclusive of non-white subjects. Based on expectations that people will speak like their fellow community members, I expect that because there is little interaction between black and white gay communities, their language use will be different. Thus, I am interested to examine the ways that these black gay men and white gay men mobilize language to different effects in conversation.

To answer these research questions, I turn to the participants and the data that I collected. Participants took part in two types of recording sessions: a sociolinguistic interview designed to

obtain a base sample of speech and to become familiar with the participant's personal history and personality. I conducted the interview alone with the participant. The second type of session consisted of a group discussion between several participants which I both moderated and took part in as a participant. While both types of sessions allow access to sociophonetics and discourse features and markers, the second type of session contained discourse from a multi-speaker environment. These discourse features create a window into the stances exhibited by the speakers toward their speech, the speech of their interlocutors, and the topics under discussion. In addition to the primary audio recording, concurrent video recording occurred, which serves as both a back-up to the primary audio record and to provide additional information for a future multimodal analysis. Multimodal analysis allows the integration of essential body and facial gestures (including expression and gaze) with linguistic phenomena. These visual observations can be used to support claims made about the discourse derived from the audio recording.

3.1   PARTICIPANTS

Because I am interested in the ways that ethnicity may affect the participants' speech, I aimed to recruit some men who identify as white and some who identify differently. As such, the participants must identify as both male and gay in order to align the findings here with the vast majority of existing literature on the topic of the speech of gay men and to allow compatibility with the extension of this knowledge. The original scope of this project was extraordinarily ambitious, aiming to recruit participants from four major racial/ethnic groups in the United States: Anglo (white, non-Hispanic), African American (black, non-Hispanic), Hispanic (of any race), and Asian (East Asian, non-Hispanic), but due to the difficulty in recruiting non-white

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participants, the current project examines language as used by white and African American men, the two largest ethnic groups in the United States (as of 2010, whites make up 72.4% of the population, with African Americans making up 12.6% [Humes et al. 2001]).

Although the original recruitment materials reflect a wider range of eligible racial backgrounds (white, African American, Asian American, or Hispanic), I was only successful in recruiting white and African American participants. I also required that participants also be between the ages of 18 and 28. The lower end of this age range was primarily chosen to avoid complications with IRB requirements regarding research conducted with minors. The upper end of this age range was chosen somewhat arbitrarily but is intended to keep all of the participants within a fairly narrow age range, to encourage more or less similar historical contexts during childhood, adolescence, and the present young adulthood, which have a significant bearing on the use (or lack of use) of gay-sounding speech features. For example, people of the same age range are more likely to share recreational and entertainment interests which certainly influence the kinds of topics they may choose to discuss and form social connections through.

Finally, all participants were required to be native speakers of American English. I introduce this requirement for several reasons. The first and most important is that the majority of research on language and sexuality as it relates to gay men examines American speakers. Thus, in order that the results from this dissertation be compatible and speak to the existing literature, it is important that the base linguistic structures be the same. Secondly, eliminating the possibility of variance due to English being second language speech means that variation in the speech can be more likely attributed to gay ways of speaking. Finally, of course, given that my data collection was based in the United States, it means that native speakers of American English were most readily available.

As a final note, all of the above requirements are self-reported. As an aid to recruitment, participants were paid $10/hour in cash (in 15 minute/$2.50 increments rounded to the nearest quarter hour) for their participation in the project. Participants were recruited via physical fliers in high traffic areas, the snowball method with acquaintances, friends, and co-workers, as well as digital fliers in newsletters and social media sites.

3.2   DATA COLLECTION

Participants, recruited from the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania area, first took part individually in a sociolinguistic interview which I conducted. The sociolinguistic interview took place in a conference room located on the campus of the University of Pittsburgh at a large table. As with the standard sociolinguistic interview, I asked the participant questions with the intent that the participant use them as a jumping-off point for his answers. I viewed my role simply to elicit further detail when necessary and to guide the topic of the interview to ensure adequate coverage of the desired topics, outlined below (see Appendix B). Broadly, topics covered included upbringing, the coming out process, primary social networks (such as family, friends, significant other(s), work or school), family relationships, and social activities.

All told, there were eight sociolinguistic interviews with eight participants, four white and four black. The small size of participants is due to the difficulty in recruiting men of color. After several months of recruitment efforts, I had only managed to secure participation from four black participants. Because of the lack of gay men of color in my own social networks, I was unable to recruit black men via these methods and the sites of my advertising reflected my own gay Pittsburgh geography, which are spaces that are visited predominantly or exclusively by

white gay men. By the time I began interviews, I had only been contacted by one Hispanic gay man, but due to his residence in Washington D.C., I could not include him. No Asian American gay men responded to my recruitment efforts. With four black participants enrolled in the study, I halted the recruitment of white participants out of a desire for symmetry in numbers.

The interviews were conducted between January and March of 2012. With just over 600 minutes of total interviews, the shortest of them lasted just 51 minutes and the longest lasted 92 minutes; the average interview was 75 minutes long.

The focus groups consisted of small groups of participants (between two and five) who met together in a private room with me. There were two ethnically homogeneous focus groups (in which all of the participants were all white or all black) and one ethnically heterogeneous groups (consisting of one black participant and two white participants). I posed a few questions in an attempt to foster free discussion and participated, myself, in the discussions. Here, I viewed my role to be to encourage the participation of all participants as much as is natural and appropriate through participation and elicitation. Although I attended the group with some proposed topics including entertainment, society and politics, as well as personal and group identity (but see Appendix B for details), not all of the group sessions included the aforementioned topics and they all included topics not included in my list.

All interactions were recorded with a Sony electret condenser microphone with a Zoom H4N handy recorder. For the first five participants, the microphone was placed as inconspicuously but as close to the speakers as possible, often with the microphone placed on the table between the participant and me. Thereafter, participants wore a microphone clipped to their shirt underneath their chins, in order to capture the best sound quality possible. For the focus groups, as a result of a lack of equipment, two microphones were placed at either end of the

table; the conversations were recorded in stereo and the two tracks later separated into separate files. Additionally, the interactions were video recorded using a Flip Video UltraHD camera on a tripod or posed someplace with a wide view of those in the conversation. The video recordings will not be included in this dissertation and represent data for future analysis.

3.3   DATA ANALYSIS

The audio recordings form the data used for the following analyses. As covered previously, I will turn to a more qualitative discourse analysis which can reveal evidence supporting the existence of important attitudinal and social beliefs regarding a wide variety of elements such as the speakers, the interlocutors, the topics of conversation, communities, as well as orientations toward or away from said elements.

4.0   PARTICIPANTS

The participants for this dissertation were recruited from the general Pittsburgh area; none of the participants traveled farther than 20 miles to the research site. Although many of them were students or professionals living in the area temporarily or only recently, all of them had been in Pittsburgh for at least two years. Of my recruitment methods, the one that proved the most successful was advertising with local universities' gay-oriented student groups. These student groups (whose foci are broader than just gay men, but whose scopes vary from organization to organization) included my recruitment statements (Appendix C) in their newsletters, primarily digital. They also agreed to post physical fliers in their offices. These organizations proved to be the richest source of recruitment, allowing me to work with all four of my white participants and one black participant.

Meeting non-white gay men proved to be much more difficult. Fliers and other recruiting efforts through bars and nightclubs, cafes and restaurants, saunas and bookstores, community health outreach centers, and community organizations proved to be unsuccessful. My personal networks only included one non-white gay man who was unable to refer me to other black, Asian, or Hispanic gay men (either through lack of contact or lack of willingness). In the end, I was able to meet one black participant through a coordinator for a research project on gay men's health issues. The other two black participants were referred to me by a former student of mine

and one of the white participants already participating in the project. Both of them had a friend or acquaintance who agreed to participate and referred these two individuals to me.

Despite my best attempts, I was unable to meet any gay men who were neither white nor black in the Pittsburgh area. I invited my participants to tell their friends and acquaintances about the project, if they felt comfortable to do so, and asked during the interviews about non-white populations of gay men. Curiously, none of the black men in the study said they knew of any other black men; and none of the men in my study knew of any Asian or Hispanic gay men in Pittsburgh. As a result, this dissertation deals with four white and four black participants, interactions between them and me, as well as some group sessions. I return to the question of networks later in this dissertation, especially as it concerns non-white gay men.

Table 1. Participant overview.

Pseudonym	Age	Race	Years in Pittsburgh	Occupation
Nunu	19	black	19	cosmetology
Richard	21	white	21	warehouse
Nathan	19	white	2	student
Edward	22	white	8	pharmacy tech
Oscar	21	white	2	retail
Robert	20	black	3	student
Ryan	27	black	10	food service
Lucas	21	black	3	student

The preceding table provides a summary of some of the relevant details regarding the eight participants that feature in my data. All of my participants are native speakers of American English, having been born and raised in the United States with one exception, who was born in an Anglophone country and moved to the US in early childhood.

4.1   NUNU

I was put into contact with Nunu by another researcher who was working at the Pittsburgh branch of a multi-site gay men's health study focusing on white, black, and Latino gay men. The first time that I met Nunu, I wasn't sure that I'd identified the right person; he arrived wearing sparkly heels, a blond wig, long curved acrylic nails, and traditionally feminine makeup. Taller than I, he carried a purse and wore tight-fitting jeans and a loose blouse. As we sat down to talk, he readily told me about himself. He lives with his mother outside the city of Pittsburgh, where he works as a cosmetologist. He identifies as a black gay man despite his seemingly trans appearance, which is related to his membership in the ballroom community.

Only passingly familiar with ballroom, I asked Nunu to help me understand it, and he immediately referred me to the classic 1990 documentary *Paris is Burning*. According to this documentary and Nunu's lived experience, the ballroom scene is largely an underground one. While it is open to membership from anyone, there are no specific nightclubs or other venues that regularly host ballroom competitions, there is no official governing body, and not all community members publically identify as such. The community is organized around houses, which can be thought of as guilds or family-style teams; they often—but not always—have a House Mother and a House Father, two parental figures whose own gender identities don't always match their gendered titles, who help to coach younger participants in their competitions. The houses can often serve as surrogate families, especially for those house members whose families of origin have rejected them due to their sexual orientations and/or gender identities.

Members of the ballroom community compete against each other at balls, often hosted at local nightclubs, but also at other community centers (such as the YMCA). There are several events that may take place and competing in such an event is known as "walking X," where X is

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the name of the event. Many of the events involve costume, makeup, and manners designed to allow the participant to blend in with a target group; for example, a person who walks Femme Queen Realness would be judged on his ability to be indistinguishable from heterosexual women. Butch Queen Realness relies on the ability of a man to emulate the style and appearance of any number of male-identified stereotypes, such as Thug, School boy ("preppy"), or Executive (business man).

The dance style known as vogue (not to be confused with the dance style presented in Madonna's 2006 "Vogue" music video, Nunu cautioned) was born in the ballroom scene, and is an important part of the main competition known as Butch Queen Vogue, which consists of male-identified dancers who compete using five elements of the event: hands (using the hands in a stylized manner to showcase the face), catwalk (emulating haute couture fashion models), duckwalk (a walk performed while squatting deeply, often in high heels), floor performance (overall dance and choreography), and spins and dips. Dancers walk simultaneously and are eliminated one-by-one by a panel of judges until one person remains and is crowned the winner. Winning involves name notoriety for the dancer as well as his House, trophies, and sometimes cash prizes.

Nunu regularly walks Butch Queen Vogue, Femme Queen Realness, Femme Queen up in Pumps (BQ performed in heels higher than six inches), and Face (showcasing a flawless, smooth, beautiful face). As part of his competing, he has spent upwards of $600 for a single *effect*—clothing which he sometimes creates from purchased women's retail clothing that he alters, or clothing that he has specifically made for him by another sartorially-talented House member. At the time of our meetings, Nunu was currently reigning champion in the Pittsburgh region for Hands, Face, and Femme Queen Realness.

His participation in the ballroom scene and his success in events that require emulation of cis-women (sometimes called female-bodied persons, women-born-women, or biological women) helps to contextualize his gender nonconformist appearance. Nunu had also been taking estrogen supplements and testosterone blockers for almost a year at the time of our meetings, which he credited for his smooth skin, "soft [facial] features," nascent breasts, and attractive buttocks. He has a prescription for the hormones, which he is over-dosing in order to hasten its effects, a fact his physician is aware of.

I was confused about his hormone therapy and his gender presentation, as it conflicted with what I had expected in my participants: gay, cis-gendered male participants. Nunu however did not identify as a trans woman, nor as a woman, but rather as a gay man. Further, his boyfriend of several years is very supporting of his "transition," the word he used to describe the moment when he began to take hormones.

His parents are accepting of both his gender presentation and his participation in the ballroom scene. His mother has attended a few balls, and although she isn't well-versed in all of its elements, she is a strong supporter of Nunu when he competes. Nunu described having recently had his nails done while his father accompanied him and they spoke together for the better part of an hour. It was clear to me that this was evidence of his father's acceptance of him as Nunu believed few fathers would participate in their sons' having long, brightly-painted acrylic nails done (during our interview, Nunu showed me that he even had his name painted on the index fingernail of each hand).

His father, however, is not approving of his four year-long relationship with his boyfriend. Nunu attributes this to his boyfriend's "being in the streets." When I asked for clarification, he hesitated before saying that his boyfriend is a "pharmacist." Although he didn't

elaborate specifically, I understand this to mean that his boyfriend is involved somehow in the manufacture, distribution, or sale of illegal drugs such as marijuana or methamphetamine.

During our discussion, Nunu enjoyed the opportunity to tell me about ball room culture and especially its lingo. He was very attentive to my facial expressions, stopping to further define a term he had just used when my face betrayed my confusion. He told me to view videos of his dance battles on YouTube and invited me to the next ball, which was taking place in a month.

4.2   RICHARD

Richard is twenty-one and works in a warehouse just outside Pittsburgh's city center. He is native to the Pittsburgh area and grew up in the South Hills with his two parents and his older sister. Although he attended a public university in the greater Pittsburgh area for two years, he has not graduated from university and currently works at a job that his best friend secured for him before moving to Los Angeles. After leaving his undergraduate studies, he lived with his parents for a few months before the situation became too tense and he moved into an apartment with a friend of his.

He gets along well with his sister, who also lives and works in the city, but his relationship with his parents is tense. He attributes the majority of the tension to his father's divergent beliefs about homosexuality—he believes it to be a choice, in contrast to Richard's belief that he never chose to be gay. During one of the few conversations that he has had with his father regarding his sexuality, Richard recounts that his father remarked that it felt as if he'd lost another son (referring to a little brother who died at about one year of age). He believes that his

father will never come to be accepting of his sexuality, stating that he's been out for eight years and nothing has changed.

His mother, on the other hand, seems to be more accepting of his homosexuality. The weekend previous to our discussion, Richard had introduced her to Alex, a man that he had been dating for about a month and she really liked him.

Furthermore, Richard believes his parents misunderstand him, saying that "they say that I fuck up a lot." Some of this may be attributed to his avid marijuana use, which he mentioned several times and which his parents don't approve of. After he came-out at the age of thirteen and while enrolled in Catholic grade school, his parent sent him to a therapist, whom he continues to see. He jokes that it is his longest-lasting relationship. Richard suspects that his parents had plans to send him to a Christian camp where he might have received conversion therapy.

Outside of his family, Richard is in a new relationship with Alex, whom he's known for several months but whom he's only recently started to be romantically involved. They met using a mobile phone application called "Scruff," which is a people-meeting application aimed at the bear sub-community and people connected with it. It is widely understood, however, to be primarily used as a hookup device—that is, as a method to find casual sexual partners.

He is an active participant on a local gay volleyball league, which he enjoys for the athleticism but resents the cattiness and gossip that he feels characterizes the group and its members. He frequents both gay and straight bars, where he goes with his roommate, Alex, or his other friends.

During our first meeting, we discussed his hobbies, his family, and being out. We had a good rapport, given the high degree of overlap and finishing one another's utterances. I will return to this ease of communication later in the analysis.

4.3 NATHAN

Nathan is a nineteen-year old white freshman at the University of Pittsburgh. He lives in the dorms but has plans to move into an apartment in the upcoming academic year with a friend of his from high school and her current roommate. He grew up in Harrisburg, which he describes as "not that great" and being very boring, with his two parents and a brother who is thirteen years older than he is.

He is very active in a local charitable student organization that raises money to battle hunger locally, and it is his involvement with this student group that he has drawn most of his new friends. His high school sends a large number of students to Pitt, but he finds himself having more in common with the friends he's making through his work in the organization.

He began coming out to his friends at the end of middle school by telling them that he was bisexual. However, by high school he began to realize that he wasn't bisexual but gay due to all of his relationships with women lasting just three months. He said "I never really understood why and then I was like it's probably because after three months it's probably when, like, sexual stuff- stuff starts to happen and I'm just—I'm out!"

Despite this revelation, he describes himself as having been quite depressed in high school and he finally ended up in a mental hospital. There, in one of the individual therapy sessions, one of the therapists asked him about his sexuality. Later, in a family therapy session,

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the therapist announced to Nathan's parents, "so, Nathan has something to tell you guys." The coming out process was, then, not a voluntary one for Nathan. Still, he describes his parents as very liberal and more or less accepting of his sexuality. Although his father seems to accept it, Nathan says he's unwilling to talk about it. On the other hand, Nathan's mother is quite open and accepting; they joke together about his being gay.

Nathan has never dated a man before, although he has proclaimed his love to his "best gay friend," who attends a satellite campus of the University of Pittsburgh. His best gay friend, whom he didn't name in our conversation, has rejected Nathan's verbal advances saying that he's worried that a romantic or sexual relationship would damage their friendship.

During our discussion, we discussed his favorite music and television shows and we also talked about hipsters, which he wonders whether he's becoming. According to Nathan, hipsters are defined more by their dress ("if they wear a lot of scarves and thick glasses, that's a sure tell"), appearance, and music than by an attitude or a collective set of values.

4.4   EDWARD

Edward is a white, 22 year old retail worker currently in training to become a pharmacy technician. Although he completed two years of college study at a Pittsburgh area public university, he currently has no plans to return to school. He lives with his parents and younger, eleven year-old brother in the suburbs south of Pittsburgh, but spends a fair amount of his time in the city because two of his good high school friends live in Oakland, one of the student-heavy areas of the city.

His relationship with his parents is strained at times. When I asked him if he got along with his parents, he responded apathetically: "ish." He says he gets along well with his mother, who is a fitness instructor. Although he is out to both his mother and father (but not his brother), and although he rides to work every morning with his father, Edward and his father don't talk about his sexuality. Indeed, when he came-out to his mother late one evening, her response seemed unsurprised. Edward says that he said to her "'I kind of, sort of, a lot like boys'… in those exact words." To this, she responded unenthusiastically: "Oh. Okay, well we'll talk about it tomorrow. Can you turn off the TV?" In fact, the next morning she reported that she'd told his father and she didn't "know if he's very happy about it." Their attitudes may be influenced by their religiosity, as they attend a Methodist church and make Edward go to church as well.

Edward is very artistically-inclined. He proudly showed me photos of his hand-drawn figures on his mobile phone and spent some time describing the Halloween costumes he designed for his parents, brother, and self: a metaphoric take on the Wizard of Oz (for example, as Dorothy was seeking her home, he dressed his mother as a real estate agent).

Although he seemed to be dismissive of mobile phone-based applications like Grindr and Scruff, Edward had just met his most recent date using the former. He describes the man he's seeing as "actually legit" in contrast to the "ninety percent of these people" on Grindr who are just looking for sex. I will return to his discomfort with using Grindr to meet men later in the discussion.

4.5   OSCAR

Oscar is a white, 21 year old retail worker. Our discussion focused heavily on the brand of computers whose store he works at. He enthusiastically described the training process and hopes to join an elite rank of technically-savvy employees who complete a month-long training at the corporate headquarters on the West Coast.

Like the other participants, Oscar lives at home with his parents and an eighteen-year old brother in the suburbs south of Pittsburgh. He is out to both of his parents, and although "normally it's the other way around," his dad doesn't seem to mind that he's gay. His mother, on the other hand, has reacted quite strongly against his being gay. Due to her devout, conservative Christian beliefs, she often hands him post-it notes with Bible verses—the (in)famous Leviticus 18:22 was the example Oscar offered.

Oscar has strong feelings about straight men and straight bars in general. Discussing a straight bar (that is, a bar that does not explicitly cater to a gay clientele) that has cheap drinks on Wednesday nights that he and his friends used to frequent, Oscar said that he feels "awkward there." Asked why he felt awkward, he responded that he feels "really awkward around straight men" because whenever they talk to him, he thinks to himself "you probably don't like me because I'm gay."

In general, Oscar takes a fairly active role in his friend group, which consists almost exclusively of gay men and girl friends, "which is just normally typical of a gay guy." He has strong feelings on the existence of a gay community, on gay-sounding speech, and on what it means to become a gay man; all of these topics I will return to later in the analysis.

4.6   ROBERT

Robert is a twenty year old, black junior at the University of Pittsburgh studying psychology. He grew up in Maryland just outside Washington, D.C. with his parents and a sister three years his senior. At the time of our interview, he was working as a RA in the freshman dormitories, an occupation that provides him with free room and board but entails weeknight and weekend shifts requiring him to be physically present in the dormitories. Despite these responsibilities, he enjoys working with the residents on his floor and this year aims to be friendlier with them, as opposed to the previous year when he kept more personal distance between himself and the residents.

Additionally, Robert has another job which keeps him busy when he's not in class or fulfilling his responsibilities as an RA. He views his jobs pragmatically; his RA-ship provides him with a place to live and food to eat, while his secondary employment gives him the money he needs to go out with his friends to house parties. He mentioned how he'd already fulfilled his quota of weekends being responsible for the dorm and was looking forward to "going out like every weekend" until the end of the semester.

Robert and his friends frequent house parties thrown by friends or friends of friends. He explained that house parties often charge men only a cover charge of $5 to $10 to enter and even prohibit their entry later in the evening after the party has filled up. At these house parties, which he attends with groups of friends numbering about a half-dozen, he dances and socializes as well as takes advantage of freely available alcohol.

In contrast to the other participants I met with, all of Robert's friends are straight, with the exception of one friend. He attributes his lack of gay friends to his lack of involvement in clubs and organizations like the Rainbow Alliance ("Pitt's undergraduate LGBTQA student

organization" according to their website, 2012). He doesn't participate, not out of having had some negative experience or having a difference of opinion or politics with the groups, but simply due to logistics. He always seems to have RA meetings during their meetings.

Outside of the parties, which he admits to not having attended a really good one in some time, Robert's main interest is watching dramas and reality television. He says he watches "every show that has 'wives' in [the title]."

His parents are both natives of Washington, D.C. His father is a government employee working for the National Oceanographic Data Center and his mother has been a homemaker since before Robert can remember. When I asked about his relationship with his parents, he was hesitant to say he had a good relationship with them. Still, his father has helped him find summer employment with his employer for the past several years.

He is out to his parents and his sister, although curiously his telling of his coming-out story was less enthusiastic than I had come to expect both of the participants in my study and of gay men in general. I will return to this point later in the analysis.

4.7   RYAN

Ryan was the last participant I recruited for the study and was sent to me by a student of mine who knew him from a live action role playing (LARP) group on campus. At that time, I had interview four white participants and two black participants, with one additional black participant scheduled and I wanted the symmetry of four white and four black participants.

As his transcripts will reflect, Ryan speaks very quickly and he was very talkative during our first meeting. He was eager to answer questions and was the only one to comfortably and

assertively disagree with me. For example, in discussing the trouble I'd been having in recruiting black gay men to participate in my study, I said, "they're impossible to find. Like, you guys are a rare breed." Ryan responded quickly: "Actually, it's not necessarily that. It's just that they might not necessarily be willing to deal with you that much because you're kind of white." Sometimes, he talked so fast that he often quickly repeated or restarted the first few words of his utterance. Nonetheless, Ryan spoke to me openly and willingly about being a nerd, and in contrast to the other black participants, being black and being gay.

Ryan grew up in Cleveland, Ohio with his parents who divorced in his adolescence. His mother's severe alcoholism had a detrimental impact on his relationship with her. He also attributes his mother's southern roots, which he equates with Christianity and an unaccepting attitude toward homosexuality, with his relative lack of contact with her. On the other hand, he describes his father as being a northerner, which he equates with progressive, less religious characteristics. Having lived with his paternal grandparents for a while and describing them of very accepting of his homosexuality, even inviting his boyfriends over for dinner, he understands his father's family to be more open and accepting. He attributes this openness to several of his (paternal) uncles to having "married outside their race."

Ryan says that his relationship with his father is mostly good and stated that "he kind of took [his] coming out better than [his] mom did—which is really ironic." He recognizes the general, anecdotal pattern that mothers usually have an easier time accepting their sons' revelations of homosexuality.

Ryan describes his older brother as having inherited his alcoholism from their mother. He doesn't have a good relationship with his brother, and appreciates living in Pittsburgh for the distance it affords him.

Having worked in several industries and lived in multiple cities in Ohio, then in Phoenix, Arizona, and now in Pittsburgh, Ryan has just started working in food service at a local hospital with the hopes of capitalizing on the hospital's nurse training program for employees later this year. He lives just outside the city in an apartment with two roommates.

When he isn't working at the hospital, he is an active LARPer and enjoys the live action component to more traditional table-top role playing games (such as Dungeons and Dragons, for example) because it has less dice-rolling. He also describes himself as an avid console video-gamer, which forms part of his self-described nerd identity. Finally, he studies two forms of martial arts, having attained middle ranks in them.

Interestingly, Ryan talked unashamedly about seeking out casual sex via mobile apps and on-line sites such as Grindr, Adam4Adam, and Manhunt. While he didn't exhibit the same embarrassment as other participants did when discussing these sites, he also stated his preference for another on-line dating site that was mentioned by him and a few other participants: OKCupid. He describes it as being "less hook-up oriented."

Our conversation spanned topics from role playing and video games to drinking strategies in order to avoid becoming too drunk and stereotypes surrounding black people and gay people.

4.8   LUCAS

I had met Lucas a few months previous to beginning the Pittsburgh data collection phase of my dissertation and had mentioned possible participation in it, as I knew him to be both black and gay. By the time we sat down for our first recorded meeting, we'd spent some time together hanging out with his friends and interacting in academic settings so we were better acquainted

with each other personally than I was with the other participants, whom I'd only met for the first time at each of our individual meetings.

Lucas is a 19 year old black gay senior at the University of Pittsburgh studying Japanese. He was born and spent the first handful of years in Jamaica before moving with his mother and father to suburban Philadelphia after his mother joined the US Navy. Shortly after their arrival in the US, his parents were divorced and his mother married his step-father, whom he gets along with "okay." In middle school, his parents moved to "real Philadelphia" and he attended private middle school and a magnet, college-preparatory public high school. He has three little brothers, the oldest of which is fourteen.

He describes himself as having "a good long-distance relationship" with his parents. He views his mother as slightly over-protective, especially when he's at home during college breaks. When I asked him if he's out to his mother, he said the situation was complicated, the specifics of which I return to later in this analysis.

In general, I wonder if Lucas was uncomfortable with the interview due to his hesitance to speak about topics beyond the most banal. His speech is characterized by long (over a second) pauses between short phases and even words. His answers to my questions indicate an unwillingness to express certainty on the topic. This slow style of talk contrasts markedly with Ryan's rapid-fire speech and openness to discussing topics related to gay identity, gay speech, racial identity, and so forth.

4.9   GROUP SESSIONS

After I had completed the individual sociolinguistic interviews with each of the participants, I began to organize group meetings. My goal was to invite three or four participants to meet at the same time and to record the interactions. In the end, I was able to hold two group sessions; the first group session resulted in three participants having an approximately two-hour discussion with me: Nunu, Richard, and Nathan. The second group session, which lasted just under two hours, was composed of three of my four African American participants: Robert, Ryan, and Lucas. In both group meetings, I acted as participant-observer, taking active part of the discussions, which took place in the same meeting room as the individual interviews. I used the same recording equipment, but this time recorded from two separate microphones on the same stereo channel, placed at either end of the long conference table. At the end of the meetings, I paid each of the participants in cash as described above. I now turn to an introduction of each of the two group meetings.

4.9.1   Group 1

Nathan and Richard arrived at almost the same time and we began with introductions and small talk about living in Pittsburgh. All three of us were also familiar—to one degree or another—with the fourth season of RuPaul's Drag Race, a reality television show featuring twelve drag queen contestants competing elimination-style for the title of "America's Next Drag Superstar." During the episode that aired the week of our meeting, one of the more controversial contestants, Willam, had just been disqualified from the competition much to the astonishment of the other contestants and the viewers. Consistent with reality television programming, the show did not

disclose the reason for his disqualification, stating only that he had violated the rules and had to leave immediately. We speculated wildly on the reason for his dismissal when Nunu arrived, about ten minutes after the recording had begun.

Nunu arrived, resulting in a short period of recording during which I left the room to welcome him and direct him to the nearby bathroom. I rejoined the conversation shortly before Nunu's return and the introductions began again. As with our first meeting, Nunu arrived wearing a wig, high heels, acrylic nails, and a blouse, carrying a woman's purse. When Nunu came into the room, he introduced himself and exchanged names with the other participants, and then I caught him up to speed that we had been discussing Willam's disqualification. The discussion continued with Nunu talking about the ballroom scene, which both Nathan and Richard found fascinating and had little background knowledge about.

Other topics of conversation included gay communities in places familiar to the participants, including Pittsburgh and southern California, the demands of doing drag, whether bisexuals really exist (or are just fence-sitting), coming out stories, gender normativity in our youth, our relationships with our families, going out in Pittsburgh to gay and non-gay venues, gay pride events, celebrities and celebrity crushes, and the definitions of gay subcultures (such as twinks and bears). I will return to many of these topics later in the analysis.

Although all of the participants spoke during our two hours together, Nathan contributed the least. This is not to say that he was unwilling or unenthusiastic during the conversation, but perhaps that Richard and Nunu (as well as I) either had such a good rapport or a high-involvement conversational style (to be contrasted with his own reserved conversational style) that they carried the conversation and were successful in introducing topics. Nathan's

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contributions to the discussion consisted mainly of anecdotes related to those always recounted, answering direct questions, and laughing at jokes.

4.9.2 Group 2

The second group meeting occurred almost a month later in mid-April. I invited Robert, Ryan, and Lucas to meet with me. Nunu did not provide me with an e-mail address and his phone had been shut off so I was unable to get ahold of him until after I'd already finished meeting with participants. Again, we met in the same conference room as the earlier individual interviews and all three participants arrived at roughly the same time. The four of us talked together for about an hour and three-quarters until their varied commitments that evening brought an end to our discussion.

The first several minutes of our discussion were concerned with the bomb threats at the university, which had reached their peak in the preceding several weeks. Since Robert was working as an RA in the university dorms, and the dorms had been targeted for bomb threats in the middle of the night on several occasions, Robert had been evacuated in the early morning on five occasions. We also discussed bomb threats and lock-down drills at our respective high schools, which led the discussion to the topic of the racial makeup of our high schools. Only Robert's high school was predominantly black while Lucas' and Ryan's high schools were quite ethnically heterogeneous. We also discussed coming out in college, which was an experience common to Ryan and Robert. Lucas, on the other hand, responded to my question about whether he was out in high school by saying, "I wasn't in." He further explained that he didn't tell people about his sexuality but that it was known to several of his friends and spread into other social circles.

Our discussion spanned several topics thereafter, including the racial makeup of Ryan's native Cleveland and the phenomenon of white flight, perceived social differences between working and middle class people both white and black, pet ownership, blind date stories, the group members' gold-star gay statuses, some celebrity crushes, finishing with a long discussion of favorite comedians. In contrast to the content of the first group's discussion, the second group did not spend as much time discussing topics related to being gay and gay communities. As with the topics discussed in the aforementioned interviews and group sessions, I will return to some of these same later in the analysis.

Throughout the discussion, Robert and Lucas took approximately equal part in the conversation, but Ryan—and I to a lesser extent—dominated the conversation, perhaps due to his rapid speech style as much as to his gregarious personality. Lucas and Robert were successful in introducing the majority of the topics, even if Ryan was receptive and enthusiastic about almost all of the topics of discussion.

4.10   PARTICIPANT OVERVIEW CONCLUSION

I have provided much in-depth information about the participants and the two group sessions in order for the reader to become familiar with the men who form the entirety of this project. Because my research is an investigation of these men's mobilization of language in the production of their identities, it is important to understand the context of their backgrounds. As their individual family, social, and professional experiences figure heavily in their own conceptions of themselves, I provide some very basic information about some of this background

information. As we will see in the following chapter, it is through their knowledge of themselves and the cultural ideas about what it means to be gay that these men shape their language use.

By drawing on their own personal histories, and the personal histories of the others in the project which they sometimes explicitly elicit and provide unsolicited in interaction, the participants craft for themselves identities that are intelligible to each other. In order to understand their contributions to the conversations, it is insufficient to know only that they are all gay men living in the Pittsburgh area; rather, it is essential to know a small amount about their ages, their occupations (broadly-speaking), their social circles, and other portions of their lived experiences.

Additionally, it is my hope that knowing a bit about the backgrounds of these participants will aid the reader in navigating the transcripts and re-creating the interaction from the written word. It is for these reasons that I have provided such in-depth material in preparation for the data analysis to which I now turn.

5.0   DATA ANALYSIS

In order to uncover the identity construction and interpretation of the men in this study, I focus on the language employed by these men and how their language use reflects both their knowledge or ignorance of homonormativity and their adherence or identification with homonormativity. To do so, I analyze assessments as well as pauses and hedges as markers of a current or upcoming dispreferred second pair part. Both of these features reflect either directly (assessments) or indirectly (dispreferred second pair parts) the participants' views on and affiliations with homonormativity. The four main elements of homonormativity under investigation are hypersexuality, the coming-out narrative, femininity, and the trajectory of gay life. I consider these three first before turning to the question of black speakers' use of language as it reflects their understanding and participation in homonormative scripts.

5.1   ASSESSMENTS OF HYPERSEXUALITY

In this first section I demonstrate how assessments reflect participants' ability to successfully interpret speech about the element of hypersexuality, which is closely associated with homosexuality and indicates their knowledge of homonormativity as well as their alignment with it.

In the following transcript, Richard and I discuss Pittsburgh nightlife, and we both negatively assess bars in Pittsburgh. By identifying the assessable—in this case, P-Town and Lucky's—we are able to affiliate ourselves with homonormative ideals of public and private sexuality and appropriate objects of sexual desire. Our shared use of these negative assessments is intimately tied to discourses of homonormativity that enforce monogamy and the normative privacy of sexuality. Despite a general and growing acceptance of gay men and gay couples in American society, perverse fascination and disgust pervade whispered or outraged discussions of homosexual sexual activity, especially anal sex. In order for gay men to be rendered palatable to heteronormative America, sexual activity must be carefully hidden in private and homonormative men must reject outward signs of erotic behavior. To that end, Gay Pride events are critiqued for their wanton display of sexuality via go-go dancers, leather daddies, and other scantily clad parade participants and observers. As a celebration of pride in identity and outreach efforts to combat the spread of HIV and other STIs, Gay Pride events may be welcomed, but to publicize same-sex sexual activity is highly stigmatized.

Similarly, gay bars are fun and appropriate places for straight women for a girls' night out with friends or to celebrate bachelorette parties because they represent a place where dancing and drinking are encouraged activities, often among trendy and fashion-forward patrons, with little risk of sexual predation by straight men. Puar writes that "US patriotism momentarily sanctions some homosexualities, often through gendered, racial, and class sanitizing…" (2006, 71). I would argue that there is also a considerable degree of sexual sanitizing; homosexuality is appropriate as long as Americans aren't made to confront the sexuality in homosexuality. Homonormativity regulates overt displays of sexuality on the part of gay men by requiring strict adherence to puritanical ideals of the privacy of sexuality.

In negatively assessing certain aspects of the bars under consideration, we reflect not only our knowledge of how they fall outside the normative boundaries of acceptable gay male activities as well as define ourselves as the normative kinds of men whose patronage of these bars is not for their erotic potential, but for approved purposes of dancing and socializing with friends.

Our discussion started by asking Richard about the places he liked to spend time at in Pittsburgh, which led to the topic at hand: gay bars in Pittsburgh. The first bar I mention is 5801, named for its street address in the trendy Shady Side area of Pittsburgh and frequented by mostly middle-class, white gay men from early 20s to middle age. The bar has various places to sit, including an outdoor space, and although it plays generally up-beat music, dancing is not the main focus of the bar. Its atmosphere is convivial and social.

The second place I mention before correcting myself is a homosexual bathhouse located downtown. My knowledge of Club Pittsburgh comes only from information I am able to access via publically available sources, such as the local gay newspaper and the internet, but I take it to be a standard bathhouse intended exclusively as a place for homosexual men to find sexual partners for on-site sexual activity.

The third bar I mention is P-Town. This bar is well-known for its 'cruisy' atmosphere and showcasing of male strippers; its clientele is mostly middle-aged, white, working-class men, and unlike other bars in Pittsburgh, smoking cigarettes is commonplace. Again, it features upbeat music, although the dancing is limited to the nude male dancers, despite the somewhat large dance floor. P-Town is the only bar of the three I mention in this segment that garners a response from Richard, and it is this response and the ensuing discussion to which I now turn.

Transcript 1. Richard on Pittsburgh's gay nightlife.

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1  K        I've only been to::
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2  K          5801 and
3  K          [0.7] Club Pittsburgh?
4  K          no (loud voice)
5  K          not Club Pittsburgh
6  K          P-Town
7  Richard     [1.4] oh P-Town (pitch dropping)
8  K          P-Town
9  Richard     uh: P-[Town
10 K          P-Town]
11 Richard    (laughter)
12 Richard    I went (laughter)
13 Richard    [(laughter)
14 K          (laughter)]
15 Richard    [(laughter)
16 K          (laughter)]
17 K          it's funny because I don't go with my gay friends I go
              with my coworkers
18 Richard    really?
19 K          like the people I teach English with?
20 Richard    (laughter)
21 K          so there are a couple of them that are gay but usually
              we'll get a bunch of girls together
22 K          and we'll all go
23 K          [0.9] and we'll
24 Richard    (laughter)
25 K          go get a pizza at Vocelli's
26 K          and bring it back
27 Richard    you can do that?
28 K          and if you do that you get a discount
29 K          [0.8] [you'll get ten-
30 Richard    at P-Town?]
31 K          yeah
32 K          no they'll give you ten percent off the pizza? If you
              tell them you're taking it back to P-Town
33 Richard    really?
34 K          yep
35 K          [1.0] and you can just eat it at the table while a
              stripper walks around
36 K          which is kind of gross
37 Richard    (laughter)
38 K          [but that's okay
39 Richard    uhhhh (creak) a lot of gross]
40 K          that's okay
41 Richard    I
42 Richard    duh uh
43 K          [0.8] (laughter)
44 Richard    but heh uh
45 Richard    then you do not want to go to Lucky's
46 K          oh
47 K          Lucky's [is the one in the Strip District right?
48 Richard    I was telling someone]
49 K          the one [with the shamrock?
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50 Richard    yeah]
51 Richard    yeah
52 K          okay
53 Richard    I: stumbled upon there during pride
54 Richard    they had like a bus? [going around the city to all the
              bars?
55 K          uh-huh]
56 Richard    [0.6] and
57 Richard    me and my friends got off and we were like oh let's go
              here
58 K          yeah
59 Richard    so we go there in the bar and like
60 Richard    and the on the bottom floor is fine
61 Richard    and then you walk upstairs and you see all these
              flashing lights
62 Richard    and I got really excited
63 Richard    and then I turned the corner
64 Richard    [0.5] and it was just a bunch of naked guys
65 Richard    on the bar
66 Richard    and I was just like
67 K          [(laughter)
68 Richard    awww man:::]
69 Richard    I just wanted to dance (creak)
70 Richard    not sit here and watch somebody else dance
71 K          no? (laughter)
72 Richard    I just like don't enjoy that
73 Richard    not in public
74 Richard    I mean I do enjoy it but not in public
75 K          right
76 K          right
77 Richard    there's a time and a place for everything (creak)
78 K          that's right
```

During the first part of the discussion, we assess P-Town; we negotiate our assessments of the

bar. Our shared negative assessment unfolds over the course of lines 6 through 17, starting with

Richard's first negative assessment in line 7; however this negative assessment is not as strong as

it might otherwise be. Richard might have uttered an "ugh" or "yech" in place of his "oh"

preceding the name of the bar. Instead, his long pause and a simple, more ambiguous "oh, P-

Town" leaves room for my alignment and perhaps plausible deniability if I positively assess the

bar, which would then risk a disagreement between us.

The first naming of the bar in line 6 offers it up as an assessable, which Richard responds

to in his next line. Richard's slow, falling intonation on P-Town is his first negative assessment

of the bar, especially given its preceding "oh," in the way that one might refer to an embarrassing and troubled family member whom one tolerates but judges negatively. Richard's choice to simply repeat the name of the bar instead of responding with another form of feedback (such as uh-huh, a nod, or some other affirmative signal) reflects his negative assessment of "P-Town." Another intonation pattern such as high pitch over the "P" with a return to normal pitch level over the second syllable might indicate simple recognition of the name and a signal to continue talking. Instead, Richard repeats the name, not for my benefit (I've already shown in the preceding line that I could successfully recall the name of the bar in question). Instead, his simple repetition of the name indicates familiarity, but does not reflect enthusiastic knowledge on his part.

On the one hand, we can affirm our own first-hand knowledge of the place, which risks affiliating us with the kind of hypersexual gay man who goes to bars for the erotic entertainment and possibility of hooking-up with other patrons. On the other hand, expressing outright condemnation or disgust of the venue risks a face-threatening act for the other interlocutor.

In fact, his repetition of the name follows a lengthy silence of 1.4 seconds, indicating a hesitance to comment further or make an explicit assessment, or his realization that a negative assessment of the bar is coming, which might conflict with my positive feelings toward it. Four total repetitions of the original naming of the bar pass before Richard breaks the pattern with an unsure laugh and a smirk in line 11. His move to perhaps give a narrative in line 12 broken off by more laughter, shared between us, indicates the hesitance to make a clear assessment. What Richard and I do not offer is an explicitly positive assessment of P-Town ("I love that place!" or "I go there all the time!") or its main feature ("I love the boys there!" or "Their dancers are

hot."). Instead, our minimal utterances tinged with judgment about P-Town allow us the time to ensure that each has the same general feelings about the bar.

My overlap with Richard in lines 9 and 10 indicates alignment with Richard and his assessment. Overlap can often indicate high involvement, agreement, and alignment as speakers take similar stances toward an object. Here, Richard and I align our negative assessments of P-Town with one another, giving rise to several turns of laughter, a possibly aborted narrative on Richard's part, and my description of my visits.

Hesitance to show positive evaluation is wrapped up in shared knowledge of P-Town as a 'cruisy' gay bar oriented explicitly toward public displays of sexuality and this conflict with homonormative scripts of gay male sexuality. To show too much close knowledge of the bar risks being perceived as the kind of hyper-sexual, promiscuous gay man who patronizes a place for its featuring male erotic dancers and the possibility of hooking-up with other patrons at the bar. This kind of unchecked sexuality is highly stigmatized in general, and especially by homonormativity, which seeks to distance the acceptable gay, monogamous couple from the AIDS crisis.

On the other hand, expressing outright condemnation or disgust of the venue risks a face-threatening act for the other interlocutor, and our interactions to date have been characterized by a high degree of cooperation and alignment.

Line 17 is the beginning of my admission of familiarity with P-Town, and the explanation for it when I indicate that "I don't go with my gay friends; I go with my coworkers." Although my knowledge of P-Town does not come from a single visit (as reflected by my use of the simple present, indicating a habitual activity), I justify my visits as occurring with coworkers as opposed to gay friends. By telling Richard about my visits in the presence of co-workers, I at

once claim authority to talk about the bar and assess its virtues (and vices) via my personal experience, while at the same time I distance myself from the sexual nature of the bar and its dancers. In contrast to visiting with gay friends, who might presumably be interested in the bar for its erotic potential, I instead position myself as attending with coworkers. The presence of, as lines 21 through 32 show, mostly female coworkers reduces the overt sexuality of the visit from a pack of ogling, leering men objectifying the body of an erotic dancer, to a raucous girls' night out.

This justification of the visit fits neatly within homonormative expectations of gay men's behavior, that should be liberal enough to enjoy an erotic dancer socially with open-minded and fun-loving girl friends enjoying some light-hearted and adult entertainment, but not erotic enough to be actively interested in the dancer as a sexual object.

Richard positively evaluates my visits with coworkers with genuine laughter in lines 20 and 22; going to a gay bar featuring erotic dancers with female co-workers is incongruous to expectations of professional relationships and demeanor with colleagues, even outside work hours. His laughter might also be part of his realization that my female company mitigates my potential negative reputation as a patron of such a bar.

As I discuss my patronage through the justification of acceptable motivations and Richard indicates his positive evaluation of these mitigating circumstances, we both align with homonormative scripts that license certain behaviors. In this instance, we reinforce the characteristic of gay men as open-minded partiers who are happy to welcome similarly open-minded female friends into gay spaces for shared laughs. At the same time, in our focus on the non-sexual elements of such visits, we open up space for negative evaluation of public, unchecked eroticism. These two sides of the visits—a platonic, social outing to P-Town as

entertainment and cheap food, and the hedonistic objectification of male bodies—are integral parts of homonormativity.

Line 39 is Richard's first explicit evaluation of P-Town and its strippers: "uhhhh, a lot of gross," which agrees with and strengthens my first move in line 36 to negatively assess naked men in proximity to food consumption. He follows up a few lines later by advising me to avoid Lucky's. His use of "then" in line 45 indicates the outcome of a previous conditional: if you don't like gross situations, "then you do not want to go to Lucky's." Here, he continues the negative assessment of overt sexuality at P-Town to Lucky's.

He characterizes Lucky's as the kind of place one "stumble[s] upon." indicating he did not intend to discover or go to a place by choice. In fact, his further explanation about the bar-crawl organized by the Pride committee in line 54 ("they had like a bus") further removes his agency from arriving at Lucky's. Since it was "they" who had the bus and it was "going around the city to all the bars," it certainly wasn't his choice to go there. Unlike my patronage of the gross P-Town in which I willingly attend with my coworkers (for the pizza and conversation, of course), Richard only accidentally knows about Lucky's.

Richard's particular dislike of Lucky's stems from its featuring naked dancers instead of a dance floor for patrons; this last fact receives his disappointed assessment in line 68 of "awww man:::." This long, drawn out utterance, with falling intonation over the "aww," returning to a high pitch over the word "man," reminds me of the way children might respond to their parent informing them that their long-anticipated trip to an amusement park would be canceled in favor of a visit to an ailing relative in a nursing home. This final evaluation serves as a sort of denouement to the story, which begins with his entering and excitement rising as he ascends the stairs. Flashing lights indicate an exciting dance floor, and Richard's hopes are up for dancing.

The climax occurs as he pauses for half a second to build anticipation and finally "turn[s] the corner" (lines 63-65) only to find "just a bunch of naked guys on the bar."

Richard's "just" in 64 is his negative assessment; rather than finding a crowd of patrons dancing on a brightly-lit dance floor, he finds merely a group of naked go-go dancers. In fact, his characterization of them as "a bunch of naked guys" reflects his assertion of their generic-ness. An indeterminate number of "guys," a very neutral word for young men lighter in inherent sexuality of "boys" or "men" or "studs," cements the unimpressive nature of this grouping. In fact, his repetition of "naked," which can be assumed from general knowledge about go-go dancers, recalls our previous discussion of the naked dancer walking around P-Town as you eat pizza, which we both agreed is "gross" (lines 36 and 39).

Our shared negative assessment of Lucky's and P-Town hinges on our shared participation in homonormative discourses that encourage going out to bars and alcohol consumption but eschew public displays of sexuality that violate broader cultural norms of appropriateness. That the focus of Lucky's second floor is not dancing despite its flashing lights earns Richard's "awww, man" complaint, followed by the explanatory "I just wanted to dance" (lines 68 and 69).

The "just" in line 69 serves to reduce the remarkability of his wanting to dance. Dancing, then, is an appropriate activity to undertake at Lucky's and it dovetails with the fun-loving, consumerist aspects of homonormativity. Further, his use of the past-tense "wanted" indicates his belief that he will not be able to dance because of the focus on the naked dancers hired by Lucky's for the entertainment of its patrons. The presence alone of go-go dancers does not making dancing on the part of patrons unacceptable for the bar, and perhaps Richard did end up dancing anyway. But if the focus is on the professional dancers, we might guess that individual

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dancing might be less popular that evening than other evenings, and one of the main draws of dancing in bars is the community experience of engaging in a shared dance experience. For Richard in this discussion, however, the presence of go-go boys is enough to ruin his ability to dance.

One of the ways that gay men have been rendered acceptable for heterosexual consumption is via the "GBFF" (gay best friends forever) phenomenon, as characterized in the sit-coms *Hot in Cleveland* and *Sex and the City*. Both of these shows feature four, middle-aged, socialite urban women, and they crucially also feature a gay best friend. Perhaps the best example of the gay best friend is the titular Will from *Will & *Grace. In all of these portrayals, the gay best friend is a fabulous, fashionable, sensitive, trendy friend whom a girl can rely on to provide her with all of the latest celebrity and personal gossip, fashion tips and advice, as well as company while shopping and at events when a date is required but not available. He is always willing to dance, in a group or with her during slow dances, and he loves to go out and party. He never complains about holding her purse or waiting outside the only bathroom which is a men's room while she uses it at a gay club.

Thus, my presence at a gay bar with "a bunch of girls" who are coworkers and Richard's desire to dance at Lucky's are indications of our homonormativity; we have explained our desire to patronize this bars only in homonormatively sanctioned ways: for hanging out with my girl friends and for dancing.

Richard's assertion in lines 72-74 that he isn't necessarily against eroticism in general, but that he prefers it to occur in appropriate places and at appropriate times (presumably in private spaces) is another alignment with homonormative notions of appropriate sexuality: sexual activity should be confined to the bedroom ("there's a right time and a place for

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everything"). Richard's listing of the two possible activities at Lucky's contrast acceptable and unacceptable reasons for being at Lucky's. On the one hand, "just want[ing] to dance" is an encouraged form of going out and is a reflection of being a fun-loving, consumerist, neo-liberal subject. On the other hand, "sit[ting] here and watch[ing] someone else dance" is not appropriate because it highlights the explicitly erotic design of go-go dancers. Richard's opposition of his own dancing and that "someone else danc[ing]" highlights the ways that homonormative scripts license the same or similar behavior for some people in some contexts and not for others. In some cases, it might even be appropriate within these scripts for Richard to exuberantly dance on top of a bar, especially if a group of friends encouraged him to do so.

Richard's explicit naming of the problematic nature of erotic dancing as being in the wrong time and place invokes the kinds of times and places where erotic dancing and other overt displays of sexuality are licensed: under homonormativity, same-sex sexuality is exclusively reserved for very private spaces and times. One of the main critiques of *Will & Grace* was that Will appeared to be gay in all but sexuality, with an almost complete lack of physical affection between Will and other men. The contemporary sit-com *Modern Family* similarly lacks representation of the two main characters' sexual desire for each other, unlike other television shows on the same channel or time slots that represent heterosexual couples. Homosexual sex is one of the necessary evils of homonormativity, and it is properly relegated to the bedroom between two, monogamous people. Richard's assertion that it occurs there in the correct "time and a place" for it coincides neatly with these ideologies.

So, our ability to appropriately interpret each other's assessments of P-Town and Lucky's and the activities that take place there is predicated on the familiarity and understanding of homonormativity that we have in common. It is because of this agreement in assessment that

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Richard can offer his narrative about Lucky's that pairs it with P-Town, which we both agree is "gross." At the same time, we reinforce homonormativity by sharing a successful interaction that hinges, in part, on our shared interpretation of assessments about sexuality and our participation in sexually charged sites, even if this is only part of the real reason for why we patronize these establishments.

In a separate conversation I had with Edward, we discussed Pittsburgh nightlife and again the attractiveness of a potential bar or club was related to its level of overt eroticism. Edward shares Richard's appreciation for dancing but expresses disgust at overt displays of sexuality, especially among strangers.

Transcript 2. Edward on Pittsburgh's gay scene.

```
1  K        so do you go out?
2  Edward   [0.8] umm: to drink?
3  K        yeah
4  K        or anything
5  K        dance?
6  Edward   umm: we used to go to Pegasus
7  Edward   but that closed down
8  Edward   um
9  Edward   and
10 Edward   Pegasus was actually really skanky
11 K        yeah
12 Edward   umm
13 Edward   we've been to 5801
14 K        uh-huh
15 Edward   that's really nice
16 Edward   umm
17 Edward   I think it's because it's
18 Edward   um it's a somewhat of an older crowd
19 K        right
20 Edward   so they're not like insane
21 K        uh-hm
22 Edward   and I can't
23 Edward   like as much as I want to dance sometimes like
24 Edward   like I don't want to be around insane people that are
            trying to like
25 K        hook-up
26 Edward   hump my leg
27 Edward   which isn't really a problem for me
28 K        uh-hm
29 Edward   it's more of a problem for my friends
```

Edward starts by claiming authority to speak about the Pegasus nightclub by saying he and his friends "used to go" there and then providing further information about its status as "closed down" (line 7). His assessment comes in line 10, where he describes it as "actually really skanky," a strong adjective describing sordid sexuality. The word "skanky" usually describes women with suspect sexual morals, people who have multiple sexual partners perhaps, or people who are infected with a sexually transmitted infection (attributed to sexual promiscuity or lack of choosiness in sexual partners). As a descriptor for a nightclub, "skanky" describes its patrons and a general atmosphere of a marketplace of sexual partners.

Indeed, his reason for negatively assessing Pegasus as "really skanky" comes later in the discourse, in lines 23 and 24. Here, he contrasts Pegasus with the "really nice" (line 15) 5801, describing the former's atmosphere as being "around insane people that are trying to, like… hump my leg (lines 24 and 26). Edward's characterization of the patrons as "trying to… hump my leg" renders them animal in their behavior. In fact, the inappropriate over-sexualization of these patrons is double: on the one hand they behave as dogs do without human morals to control their sexual outburst in public. On the other hand, they are so driven by their sexual desires that they hump body parts that are generally not the prime target of sexual activity. For Edward, this behavior qualifies as "insane" (lines 20 and 24) and is clearly negatively assessed.

In contrast, 5801 features "somewhat of an older crowd, so they're not, like, insane" (lines 18 and 20). Presumably, Edward can go to 5801 to dance and not feel threatened by insane patrons seeking to hump the closest warm body part, regardless of relationship or consent.

Edward's revulsion of Pegasus and preference for the gay but not sexual 5801 aligns him closely with the same homonormative scripts about consumerism and appropriate eroticism that pervade Richard's and my aforementioned discussion about P-Town. All of us have knowledge

of these hyper-erotic sites but we choose to temper this knowledge with negative assessments of such sites and the activities that they offer while explaining our desire to spend time in homosexual spaces for licensed reasons, such as dancing or socializing.

In this section, I have shown how an analysis of assessments employed by some of the participants reflects knowledge of and affiliation with homonormative attitudes that prohibit public, explicitly, erotic behavior. The excerpts here from Edward and Richard's speech reflect the tensions between same-sex eroticism that form one of the major identifying characteristics of gayness and the expectation of domestic coupledom complete with monogamy and enlightened sexuality that takes place in privacy.

5.2   COMING-OUT

In this section, I offer an analysis of the coming-out story, which almost every participant easily produced, and which forms a crucial element of a homonormative identity. Coming-out is an essential process for gay men, not just because of the need that many people feel to have the support of their loved ones for their life choices, but also because it creates legibility for gay men. It is through the continual process of coming-out that a gay man creates for himself a public identity as gay, which is central to homonormativity.

With Lucas as the exception, the participants in this study align themselves with the important trope of coming-out. Sharing their coming-out stories with me does two things in reaffirming their identities as gay. The first is that retelling one's own coming-out story is a form of coming-out in itself. By recounting how you revealed your sexuality to a third party, you are simultaneously (re)revealing your sexuality to your interlocutor. The second element of their

sharing their stories with me is that they align themselves with the broad community of gay men who find it important to have a coherent coming-out story because asking other gay men about their coming-out story is a common practice, and the sharing of coming-out stories serves to create, maintain, and strengthen community bonds. Furthermore, in order to take part in acceptable ways of being gay, it is essential to be public about one's sexuality. The ubiquitous gossip about people alleged to be gay, celebrity and non-celebrity, proves the drive to claim a sexuality publicly.

These bonds form around the knowledge that there is an important characteristic about you that requires (in some instances) disclosure and out, gay men have coming-out in common. Why they should have it in common is easily answered by asking a straight person, "Do your parents know you're straight?" The strangeness of this question makes it a favorite among gay rights activists seeking to highlight the heteronormativity underlying assumptions that heterosexuality is the default or norm and homosexuality is a deviation thereof.

By sharing their coming-out stories readily and without much prompting, these men align themselves with the aspect of gayness that holds homosexuality to be an inherent property worthy of disclosure and against the norm (one would never come-out as being blue-eyed). That their coming-out stories are ended by stating the degree of their parents' acceptance (using the word *accept* specifically) indicates also that the desired outcome is not just the disclosure of this information, but the parents' ultimate acceptance of its truth value.

In fact, we can consider the indication of the parents' acceptance of the coming-out as a sort of resolution of the story, to use Labov and Waletzky's 1967 (reprinted 1996) narrative analysis. Briefly, a narrative may contain elements that help to contextualize the narrative, such as the abstract, which summarizes the story to be told, and the orientation, which provides the

principal characters and the setting of the story. The complicating action is a series of clauses that tell the main action of the storyline; these clauses are presented in chronological order of the events as they occurred. A narrative may also contain elements that close the narrative by offering a resolution to the story or a coda, which helps to mark the end of the act of relating a narrative. Finally, the narrative may include elements of evaluation, which may occur at any point in the narrative but often occurs near the end, in which the narrator says why the story is interesting and worth telling.

The orientation of a coming-out story provides the participants in the coming-out—typically, the narrator and one or both of his parents. It usually also provides an approximate age at which the coming-out occurred. The complicating action can be told either in a series of reported speech clauses or as indirect speech, but this is the crux of the narrative.

To say that statements about the parents' acceptance of the narrator's coming-out functions as a resolution might be seen as a form of begging the question. The coming-out story is a genre that is defined by the revelation of the narrator's sexuality to parties who have some interest in knowing. If the point of coming-out is to disclose your sexuality but your parents do not understand you, or perhaps that do not believe you, or they remain unconvinced, can you be said to have come-out? And while telling a coming-out story seems to assume its success (unless perhaps otherwise marked in the abstract), the participants never failed to offer a resolution in which they indicated their parents' reaction to the news.

The men's recognition of the coming-out story's salience can be seen in their responses to my request to hear about their coming-out. I asked Oscar "when did you come-out to your parents?" to which he responds immediately with a specific date: "Easter of 2008." At first, he interpreted the question as a request for information about chronology (although at times a gay

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man's age at the time of coming-out is a salient focus of conversation), rather than an indirect request to share the story. My follow-up "how did it go?" resulted in his launching into the narrative.

Nathan immediately recognized the intent behind the same question and responds that it is his "favorite story," which is an evaluation that sets it up as a particularly interesting or noteworthy story. He went on to qualify it as a horrifying story, saying "but [laughter] it's, like, my least-favorite story." Robert told me that he is out to his parents, and after I specifically asked for a coming-out story, he initially said he didn't have one ("well, not really") before providing the classic coming-out narrative structure complete with a recreation of the dialogic exchange between him and his father and a closing evaluation: "that was pretty much it."

This coming-out is absolutely crucial to their identities as gay men, even if they themselves might not recognize it as such. The importance of the coming-out story for gay men is underscored by the existence of websites such as whenicameout.tumblr.com—a collection of user-submitted coming-out stories—and a 2011 interactive news story on coming-out in the United States on the New York Times' website (Kramer). Further, 11 October of every year is recognized as National Coming-Out Day in the United States ("National Coming Out Day") and other countries, the purpose of which is to encourage LGBT people to announce their identities publicly. All of these resources for LGBT individuals to announce their sexualities to the people in their lives (and sometimes the public at large) reflect the importance of coming-out that Kim (2009) discusses.

Kim, in agreement with other scholars on coming-out (Weston 1991, Liang 1997, Chirrey 2003), asserts that coming-out constitutes not just an important moment in the lives of LGBT individuals, but a continual process. Although common discourse around coming-out tends to

emphasize singular one-time events in a person's life (such as the first disclosure of one's sexuality to one's parents), coming-out is a process that is never complete.

Since the assumption of heterosexuality pervades for almost all individuals, coming-out is not just an event that happens once in a person's life, but is rather a possibility in every interaction. In any given interaction with a person who is not privy to my sexuality, I have to make a choice to come-out or not. For example, during my first visit to a new primary care provider when I moved to San Francisco, the office receptionist was reviewing my intake forms, on which I'd written my husband's name as the primary beneficiary of the insurance policy I use. As we do not share a last name and I am an able-bodied, adult male (who, unlike minors or the visibly disabled, are not generally considered likely to be dependents), it is not unreasonable for a medical records professional to verify my relationship as a dependent. When asked, "Who is Andy?" I can respond with either the gender-neutral "my spouse" or the gender-specific "my husband." Due to his name's gender-ambiguity, I can let the assumption of Andy's female sex slide if I want to. In social encounters, I have the option to introduce Andy as my husband or I can simply introduce Andy by name. Each of these situations, and myriad others, underscores the continual nature of coming-out.

These two preceding anecdotes are just two examples of the banal, ubiquitous encounters that necessitate an active choice. As Wood (1997, 258) puts it, coming-out "cannot be represented as a single event, like the day someone accepted religion into her life, but must be represented as a series of life-long experiences."

So in an interaction such as the interviews and group discussions I conducted and facilitated here, recounting the coming-out story does double-duty. On the one hand, it provides information about the moment in which the individual made his identity known to his parents (as

is the case in these coming-out stories, although one can come-out to anyone), but it also serves to reinforce the speaker's present gay identity with his interlocutors. Given its highly salient status as an important moment in a gay person's life, coming-out is a common discussion among gay friends; sharing it can be seen as a sign of trust and comfort and as a means of building relationships. Liang remarks:

> Consequently, gays have to continually recreate themselves through self-naming to ensure that they are heard and understood as individuals who define themselves as and therefore are gay. At the same time, they are faced with the burden of having to decide with every interaction whether or not to self-disclose. It is by virtue of being compelled to make this decision with every interaction that coming out is processual… Coming out is therefore a speech act that not only describes a state of affairs, namely the speaker's gayness, but also brings those affairs, a new gay self, into being. By presenting a gay self, an individual alters social reality by creating a community of listeners and thereby establishing the beginning of a new gay-aware culture. (1997, 292 – 293)

In the discussions that I had with the participants, the coming-out story was often exchanged; immediately after completing the coming-out story, some of the participants returned the question. The interviews presented a problem of artificiality; the participants came to me because they self-identified as gay and during the screening process, I specifically asked them to confirm their gayness. Further, if participants hadn't already made it clear, I asked them if they were out to their families, specifying their parents. This usually led them immediately into their coming-out stories, or I asked them to relate them.

Oscar, for example, alluded in his coming-out story to having to disclose his sexuality more than once to his mother. The first time, he says, she dismissed it as a suspicion rather than a conviction. This echoes my own and several of my friends' coming-out experiences. Liang mentions the dual nature of coming-out; it is not enough for a person to merely disclose his sexuality to the other party. If the other party doesn't react to the news in the appropriate way (defined often by the person coming-out as some acknowledgement of the positive truth value of

the affirmation of gayness), the gay person may feel compelled to repeat the coming-out until such a reaction is secured. Liang speaks directly to the tension between the person coming-out and his (or her) audience.

> Yet, in all instances, if the addressee does not recognize the intention, that is, if he does not apprehend the significance of the earring on the right earlobe, then it is questionable as to whether coming out has taken place. Similarly, if the addressee chooses not to recognize the intention, then the discloser's status as a gay individual, with respect to the addressee, is still unclear… What is clear is that the act of coming out is fraught with ambivalence on the part of the discloser and the recipient, rendering precise definition difficult… (292).

I turn now to some of the coming-out stories that the participants shared. I asked Richard about how he came-out to his parents during which he didn't tell them explicitly the first time. His father was eavesdropping on a phone call he was having with a classmate in Catholic middle school and heard him say he might be gay. After that, Richard says his parents sent him to see a therapist, whom he still sees regularly. At eight years, Richard jokes that it's his longest relationship by far. He also suspects that his parents wanted to send him to an ex-gay camp, but they never did it.

This fear of an ex-gay camp is not completely irrational. For example, "Kidnapped for Christ" is a documentary-in-progress about a controversial camp in the Dominican Republic where adolescents are sent by their parents in an attempt to make them straight. Additionally, the New York Times reported about sixteen-year old Zach who reported abuse at the hands of a conversion camp based in Memphis, Tennessee (Williams, 2005). Oscar's coming-out story reveals a similar fear, although in contrast to Richard who didn't choose the timing of his coming-out, Oscar explicitly told his mother he was gay. Oscar also talks about having to confront his parents more than once with his sexuality, which is another example of the aforementioned tension between the discloser and the recipient.

As an example of a coming-out story, Robert's relatively brief story follows, which exemplifies many of the key elements of a typical coming-out story.

Transcript 3. Robert's coming-out.

```
1  K        are you out to your parents?
2  Robert   [1.0] what
3  K        are you out to [your parents
4  Robert   oh yeah] yeah yeah
5  Robert   [1.0] yeah they both know
6  K        how'd that go
7  Robert   [0.8] i:::t went (high voice)
8  K        do you have a coming-out story I guess I could ask
9  Robert   well
10 Robert   not
11 Robert   really
12 Robert   so uh
13 Robert   [1.5] I guess it was the summer after my freshman year
               here at college
14 Robert   it was June
15 Robert   me and my dad were driving home from work
16 Robert   and then he:: mentioned
17 Robert   [0.9] something about which country did I think had
               the hottest women?
18 K        [uh-huh
19 Robert   I was] like none of them and he was like
20 Robert   what what does that mean
21 Robert   [1.7] I don't remember what I said next and I was like
22 Robert   oh (loud volume) I was like I'm not I'm not attracted
               to women
23 Robert   he was like what
24 Robert   and I was like yeah I'm gay
25 Robert   and he was like
26 Robert   [1.0] I don't remember what he said after that but
               then after um for two
27 Robert   like he told my mom then they talked to me about it
28 Robert   and then um
29 Robert   [1.3] I mean I was like
30 Robert   that was
31 Robert   pretty much it
32 K        uh-hm
```

Either Robert didn't hear my first question or he was employing one of the myriad tactics available to delay a dispreferred response. After a lengthy pause, he asks for a repetition of my question, to which he finally responds strongly in the affirmative and also in an off-hand, casual way by repeating the casual affirmative response and finally re-stating the answer to my question

clearly: "oh yeah, yeah, yeah… yeah, they both know" (lines 4-5). His assurance that he's out may be a delaying tactic (by offering more confirmation than strictly necessary), or it may be an affiliation with the homonormative requirement to be out to one's closest family and friends. His strong assertion that his parents know about his sexuality and in such informal language ensures me that his sexuality is old news and not a big deal for his parents. We might imagine a more formal yet still affirmative response to my question: "Yes. My parents know that I'm gay." Such a response could indicate unease between him and his parents, but instead Robert's response is to remark casually yet emphatically that he is out to his parents.

Line 6 is my request for a coming-out story, which receives more delays from Robert, previewing an upcoming dispreferred response. Either he wants to provide an answer to my question that he believes I do not expect or want, or he plans to refuse my request for a description of his coming-out. To delay this, he pauses and drags out his initial utterance in high pitch (line 7): "i:::t went-." Line 8 may be an attempt on my part to provide Robert a graceful way to refuse my request with the hedges "I guess" and "I could ask."

And Robert initially indicates a refusal or failure on his part to produce the requested coming-out story in lines 9–12 with classic markers of an upcoming dispreferred response: "well… not… really… so, uh…" Were he under less pressure to produce a coming-out story, he could have been more direct in his refusal: "no" or "there's nothing to tell." But he does ultimately produce a coming-out story.

Lines 13-15 constitute the orientation—when the story takes place and who the main people are. The orientation tells us that Robert was 18 or 19 years old and Robert came out to his father alone.

In providing both indirect and direct quotes of his father's and his reported speech, Robert's narrative then is characterized by a series of chronologically-ordered clauses. First his father asked him which country had the hottest women (line 17). Then Robert responded that none of them did (line 19). From here, we can even reconstruct a short dialogue, based on Robert's representation of the conversation:

"None of them."
"What- what does that mean?"
"I'm not- I'm not attracted to women."
"What?"
"Yeah, I'm gay."

This exchange is based on Robert's memory of the event and its verbatim accuracy isn't important. Rather Robert's representation of these utterances as clear in his mind, in contrast to his father's response to the last line which Robert doesn't "remember what he said after that…" (line 24), reinforces the expectation that coming-out is a salient moment in a gay man's life and he can be expected to remember crucial details about the event.

Finally, Robert gives us the resolution to the story in which his father and mother talked to him about his being gay (line 27). Robert's choice of words in saying "…he told my mom then they talked to me about it" indicates that the coming-out was successful. If his father didn't understand or believe his coming-out, there would have been nothing to talk to either his mother or to Robert (again) about. The coda "that was pretty much it" (lines 30-31) ends the narrative and returns the conversation to the present moment. Thus, Robert's coming-out story, for as much as he initially denied having one, contains the important elements of the genre: an orientation to the setting and participants, a climax in the complicating action where the narrator makes his sexuality clear often represented in direct quotes, and a resolution that indicates the outcome of the coming-out.

Oscar's coming-out narrative also exhibits the classic structure of a coming-out narrative. He provides the date ("Easter of 2008") and provides a series of statements starting with his "official" coming-out: "Hey, I'm definitely gay" and her response as having been "at first she was like okay." The narrative ends with a lengthy resolution: "and then she didn't say anything about it for a few days. Then- I really kind of blocked it out after this, but she was pretty pissed. Like, I thought she was going to send me away to like one of those pr- pray-the gay-away camps." Oscar also refers to the revelation of his sexuality as "it" (to say anything about it) like Robert (to talk to someone about it). Again, if his mother had not received the message of his coming-out, there would be nothing to say anything about. Even her angry reaction is proof of her understanding and believing his coming-out, even if she can't be said to have accepted it. Oscar also provides some evaluation, stepping out of the flow of events to say that he "really kind of blocked it out after" her silent response to his coming-out. He previews his mother's dramatic response, characterizing it as severe enough to send him away to a conversion camp.

With the exception of Lucas, whom I will discuss shortly, all of the men in the study produced coming-out stories that very closely followed the pattern. Their doing so is evidence of their familiarity with the genre and its structure. Even when Robert indicated that he did not have a coming-out story, he still presented one. In doing so, these participants doubly reify their gay identities by coming-out to me (again) in the retelling and in forming bonds with other gay men through the important and common shared experience of coming-out.

5.3   FEMININITY

Gayness has also long been associated with femininity, but homonormativity explicitly rejects this as an acceptable identity for homonormative men. Gender normativity is an incredibly strong policing force in American society. For example, in her book examining high school boys, Pascoe comments on the use of the word *fag*, a particularly strong epithet employed often against gay men, but sometimes against straight men, too, particularly when they are gender non-conforming. For the adolescents in her ethnography, and for many other Americans, to be a fag is to be "the opposite of masculine, whether the word [is] deployed with sexualized or nonsexualized meanings." (58)

> Fag is not necessarily a static identity attached to a particular (homosexual) boy. Fag talk and fag imitations serve as a discourse with which boys discipline themselves and each other through joking relationships… [B]ecoming a fag has as much to do with failing at the masculine tasks of competence, heterosexual prowess, and strength or in any way revealing weakness or femininity as it does with a sexual identity. (2007, 54)

Further evidence for the association of gay men with non-masculinity, which is often conflated with femininity), exists in many of the epithets for gay men: fairy, queen, Mary, sissy, nelly, and so forth. It is precisely this assumption of gender non-normativity that is highly stigmatized, and as such, sharply avoided by the participants in my project.

These men do not consider themselves feminine and reject characteristics that make them feminine. In this section, I will show how they understand femininity to be a characteristic unnatural for men through implicit assumptions about the inherent masculinity of family members and other traditionally masculine men. In addition, their talk about the gay voice, as I refer to it here, indicates their linking of such speech features with femininity and/or non-masculinity. As a consequence of this, none of them considers himself to make use of it in his

habitual speech but many of them express concern over whether I believe them to exhibit these features. Finally, they are hesitant to openly categorize my speech as gay because doing so would attribute to me some feminine or non-masculine behavior and they are unwilling to commit to such a potentially face-threatening act.

During each of the individual interviews and toward the end of the conversation, I made a point to ask the participants whether they knew what I meant when I said a "gay voice" or a "gay accent." All of the participants knew what I was referring to and each of them offered a description at my request. Richard, for example, was quite explicit about the gay voice being stereotypical and he likened it to "Ebonics." He further said that all gay men have a gay voice, even if they're not comfortable using it. In describing my voice, which he identified as gay, he said that I "articulate very well and pronounce everything," but he rejected the idea that the gay voice is feminine. Instead, he described it as "flamboyant." It's unclear exactly what *flamboyant* means here, but I take it to mean showy, affected, or otherwise non-normative. The general usage of *flamboyant* often co-indexes femininity in a man (I struggle to recall a time when I've heard the term used to describe a female-bodied person), but Richard specifically rejected the idea that the gay voice was feminine. Perhaps he, like me, views gay male gender as neither heterosexually masculine nor heterosexually feminine, but rather as something else. The term *flamboyant* can be read as a description of a man's non-normative masculinity that is also not feminine—something that is very visible and noticeable.

When I asked Nathan about gay-sounding speech, he had a difficult time providing exact descriptors for the speech variety in question. Ultimately, he settled on the term "swishy-talk," and described it as feminine and lisping, likening it to the speech produced by a contestant on RuPaul's Drag Race, season 2. I then asked Nathan if he ever used swishy-talk.

Transcript 4. Nathan on gay speech.

```
1  K         umm do you:
2  K         ever use swishy talk?
3  Nathan    yeah:
4  Nathan    um:
5  Nathan    I::
6  Nathan    I think that it's funny (laughter)
7  K         yeah
8  Nathan    eh so many people get so
9  Nathan    in a huff about that kind of thing like
10 Nathan    oh that's so rude how can you make fun of them
11 Nathan    like
12 Nathan    [c'mon
13 K         yeah]
14 Nathan    yeah
15 Nathan    it's funny
16 K         yeah
17 K         so when what
18 K         in what uh
19 K         contexts do you use it
20 Nathan    umm::
21 Nathan    I guess usually when I'm hanging out with my straight
             guy friends
22 K         [uh-hm
23 Nathan    it comes] up a lot because
24 Nathan    I mean that's just kinda
25 Nathan    sometimes
26 Nathan    I just tend to fall into just that role
27 K         [right
28 Nathan    as the] token gay guy in the group
29 Nathan    which
30 Nathan    sometimes gets to be annoying
31 K         uh-hm
32 Nathan    like if's that's how
33 Nathan    how I'm identified
34 Nathan    but uh
35 Nathan    it seems to be okay with them this year
36 Nathan    and then we just like
37 Nathan    it happens
38 Nathan    like someone says something
39 Nathan    that I
40 Nathan    is:
41 Nathan    isn't masculine or something
42 Nathan    and then you just
43 Nathan    assume that voice
44 K         uh-huh
```

Nathan's first assessment of his use of swishy talk is in line 6 when he describes it as "funny."

Whether it's funny when anyone uses it or just when he does is not clear, but this appears to be a

positive assessment of its use. However, as the conversation progresses, it becomes clear that

Nathan doesn't speak this way all the time and only does it for comedic effect. Nathan refers to people who use swishy talk habitually as "them" and characterizes his use of the speech as having been called "making fun of" such people in lines 9 and 10. Nathan then separates himself from the class of people who speak in a gay voice.

Nathan reports use of swishy talk only among his "straight guy friends" (line 21) because he falls into the role of "the token gay guy in the group" (line 28). To be a token anything, be it black guy, gay guy, trans guy, or even linguist, in a group is a mixed role at best. On the one hand, it implies acceptance of people with these identities or traits. However, it also implies stereotyped attitudes and behaviors. The token gay guy must fulfill a certain expectation of presentation, which explains Nathan's use of swishy talk or gay voice in these contexts.

In fact, despite Nathan first assessing his use of swishy talk as funny, he negatively assesses his role as token gay guy in lines 29-33, when he says it "sometimes gets to be annoying" if that's how he's identified in the group [as the gay guy]. The specific trigger for exhibiting this talk is when someone says something that isn't masculine (line 36-43) at which point "you just assume that voice."

So although Nathan reports using swishy talk as an in-joke with his straight guy friends, he also reports occasional annoyance about performing gayness for his friends as the token gay group member. Throughout this discussion, Nathan is careful to describe his use of swishy talk as an artificial and deliberate act, which separates him from "them," the people who use it habitually and perhaps despite their attempts otherwise.

The occasional assumption of femininity for comedic purposes is not specific to Nathan. Edward also reported using a gay, "dumb cheerleader" or "Barbie-esque" voice on occasion. I asked him about the time when he used this speech pattern and he provided two examples: when

he discovered there were plans to make a movie out of one of his favorite books, and when one of his favorite clothing stores announces a sale. Excitement about and participation in both of these situations aligns closely with the homonormative imperative to engage in a consumer lifestyle. Movie ticket tales and retail shopping trends are often cited as reflection of the health of the US economy due to their ubiquity, especially for the middle class.

Transcript 5. Edward on gay speech.

```
 1  K          [1.4] do you have a gay voice?
 2  Edward     umm?
 3  Edward     [1.2] part of me says no
 4  Edward     but then when I get really excited I go
 5  Edward     yes I definitely [do have a gay voice
 6  K          yeah]
 ...
 7  K          umm
 8  K          so
 9  K          I mean what kinds of
10  K          situations would you kind of pull out your gay voice
               in if you needed to (creak)
11  Edward     umm
12  K          or if you felt like it
13  Edward     [1.1] (inhale) whenever I found out that they were
               making a movie out of the Hunger Games books?
14  K          ah-[ha:::
15  Edward     I almost] shat myself
16  K          uh-huh
17  Edward     (laughter)
18  Edward     umm but I called up Owen
19  Edward     and I was like
20  Edward     oh my fu::ck
21  Edward     (laughter)
22  K          [yeah
23  Edward     I can't] believe they're doing this
24  Edward     umm
25  Edward     (exhale)
26  Edward     this um
27  Edward     this is definitely gay
28  Edward     sales?
29  Edward     at Abercrombie and Fitch?
30  K          for real
31  Edward     because they're so fucking expensive
32  K          uh-hm
33  Edward     can't
34  Edward     you can't afford anything
35  K          yup
36  Edward     unless it's on sale
```

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```
37 K            right
 ...
38 K            where do you think it comes from
39 K            the gay voice
40 Edward       umm
41 Edward       I have no idea
42 K            yeah
43 Edward       [2.0] I don't have a clue where it comes from
44 Edward       like
45 Edward       [1.6] men don't
46 Edward       like straight men
47 Edward       they don't have a
48 Edward       [1.6] uh
49 Edward       I don't know what the hell you would call it
50 Edward       you wouldn't call it a [straight voice
51 K            straight voice]
52 Edward       because they wouldn't
53 Edward       get like really
54 Edward       [0.5] gay whenever they got excited
55 Edward       [2.0] they're v-
56 Edward       I don't know
57 K            [1.6] do you think
58 Edward       [1.5] it comes from being
59 Edward       [1.4] (exhale)
60 Edward       [0.6] gay
61 Edward       (laughter)
62 Edward       [1.4] I never thought about that
```

Edward's description of gay-sounding speech fits the stereotype perfectly. In its high-pitched and Barbie-esque characteristics, it corresponds to images of gay men as feminine. In its lisping, it is obviously gay. By way of explaining what he meant by *Barbie-esque*, he effected a very gay voice, speaking in a higher pitch with a nasal quality and rising intonation over his statements. He also began to hyper-aspirate his initial stop consonants and aspirating the release of his final stop consonants (when otherwise they are unreleased).

Edward's choice of Barbie as the prototype of gay-sounding speech is significant as well. Barbie is the epitome of American femininity: slender in the waist and buxom with gleaming skin and long, blonde hair. As evidenced by her massive wardrobe, she is fashion-obsessed and loves to shop. Finally, despite recent attempts to market academically- and professionally-oriented Barbie dolls, the image of her as a beautiful but dumb blonde persists. Coupled with

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Edward's describing his speech as that of a "dumb cheerleader," the image he seeks to produce is crystal clear. Stereotypes of cheerleaders are no more flattering; cheerleaders are beautiful, dress well, often rich, popular, but woefully stupid (as further evidenced by their rising intonation, associated with uncertainty or question-asking). For Edward, then, gay-sounding speech is just as I have heard it described elsewhere: high-pitched, feminine, and gay (in the sense of being a social butterfly and being fashion- and shopping-obsessed).

Edward himself has a gay voice, but according to him only when he gets excited. As evidence of this, he cites two examples: when he found out that there was a movie adaptation of the young-adult novel "the Hunger Games," and—significantly—when he finds out that there is a sale at Abercrombie and Fitch, a notoriously expensive clothing retailer aimed at an athletic, primarily white, young adult crowd. He prepares himself for this second example in line 25 with an audible exhale and introduces it by saying, "this is definitely gay," giving an assessment before the fact which previews the upcoming characterization as highly associated with gayness.

It is quite appropriate that one of the examples that Edward gives for when he might use his gay voice is when he has the opportunity to easily acquire clothing from Abercrombie and Fitch; it fits quite nicely with the stereotype of gay men as fashion- and shopping-conscious (and might also be related to the famously homoerotic advertising campaigns Abercrombie and Fitch is famous for). Furthermore, because of Abercrombie and Fitch merchandise's well-known expense, Edward's example performs double duty in this excerpt. On the one hand, he provides an unsurprising example of when he might exhibit highly identifiable gay speech—in contexts when he is engaging in acts that reflect his homonormative consumer habits. On the other hand, he also aligns himself with the middle-class consumerist lifestyle that is essential to homonormativity. By exaggerating his gay identity via exaggerated speech, Edward highlights

the links between consumerism and gayness, and he tacitly informs me of his own participation in these expectations.

In my conversation with Robert, near the end, I returned to the question of gay speech again by asking him whether he thought my own speech was identifiably gay. I believe myself to have a gay voice in most interactions and others have identified me as gay-sounding. Since gay-sounding speech has been identified as feminine-sounding, both by the participants in my study, and by my own anecdotal research, and femininity is not a homonormative characteristic for gay men, his response to my question is telling.

Transcript 6. Robert on gay speech.

```
 1  K          do you think I have a gay voice or a gay accent
 2  K          [1.1] you can be[ honest
 3  Robert     I mean] I think
 4  Robert     yeah
 5  Robert     yeah a little bit
 6  K          yeah
 7  K          [0.5] I think I do too
 8  K          [1.2] that's why I used to get hit on all the time at
             the call center
 9  K          by only men never women
10  Robert     do you think I have one?
11  Robert     [1.0] even a little bit
12  K          uh-uh
13  Robert     okay
14  K          you [sound like
15  Robert     that's probably] why I don't get hit on [(laughter)
16  K          awww]
```

Robert's silence after my question in line 1 may have prompted me to predict his upcoming dispreferred second-pair part (an affirmative answer) so that I gave him permission to "be honest" in line 2. His hedge in line 5 "a little bit" appears to be his hesitation at ascribing such a feminine characteristic to me. Even his affirmative answer, the repetition of "yeah" is less definitive than a bold "yes," reducing the directness of his affirmation. Tellingly, Robert asks me in line 10 whether I thought he had a gay-sounding voice; he may even have interpreted my lack of an immediate answer as silence, previewing my own affirmation, which would have been a

dispreferred response. His line 11, "even a little bit" with statement intonation urges me to answer honestly. Robert's concern over having a gay-sounding voice probably stems from its associations with femininity, which is incompatible with homonormativity.

When I asked Ryan about whether he knew what a gay-sounding voice was, he identified me as having a gay voice, although he did mitigate his statement somewhat. His conception of gay-sounding speech is that it is higher-pitched and has rising intonation; further, it's feminine (something he doesn't like in a potential partner).

Transcript 7. Ryan on gay speech.

```
 1  K        so if I asked you
 2  K        if I said something about a gay voice or a gay accent
 3  K        do you know what I'm talking about?
 4  Ryan     mmm (affirmative)
 5  K        what would you say it is?
 6  Ryan     [0.4] umm
 7  Ryan     [0.4] well you kind of have one
 8  K        uh-huh
 9  Ryan     but
10  Ryan     [0.6] whether or not I have one I honestly don't know
             for sure because like
11  Ryan     if you ask five different people how I come across
             you'll get five different [answers
12  K        uh-huh]
13  Ryan     some people figure it out right off the bat and some
             people don't know unless I specifically say so
14  K        yeah yeah
15  Ryan     so it's like
16  Ryan     [0.6] I honestly don't know how I come across in that
             sense
 ...
17  Ryan     what I really can't stand though cause like I admit I
             am more attracted to
18  Ryan     I am more attracted to masculine guys?
19  K        yeah
20  Ryan     I'll like browse a guy's umm profile
21  Ryan     like on OKCupid or whatever
22  Ryan     like oh he looks great and stuff like that
23  Ryan     he looks like he's all masculine and shit
24  Ryan     like this one guy had he had like this like long red
             hair
25  Ryan     he had this whole Kurt Cobain thing going on
26  K        yeah
27  Ryan     and then he then we
```

```
28 Ryan        then we met in person and
29 Ryan        and a purse just hit me in the forehead as soon as he
               opened his mouth
30 K           uh-huh [yeah
31 Ryan        it's like]
32 Ryan        [0.7] okay and he
33 Ryan        he was just way queenier in person than [he was
               indicating on his profile
34 K           uh-hmmm uh-hmmm]
```

Typically direct, Ryan hesitated a bit to identify me as gay-sounding with two half-second pauses (pausing is very atypical for Ryan, whose speech is characteristically rapid-fire) and the intervening time-buyer "umm," before saying in line 7, "well you kind of have one." Introducing his statement with "well" mitigates the directness of the following claim, further softened by the phrase "kind of." The uncharacteristic pauses, the time-buyer "umm," and unconfident "kind of" show that Ryan, like other participants, views having a gay-sounding voice as a negative quality, and asserting that I "have one" is potentially face-threatening.

He moves immediately to the question of whether he has a gay voice without my prompting him, but ultimately remains undecided about it. In the omitted portion of the conversation, he explains his opinion that the gay-sounding voice is a learned behavior, that it's feminine, that it imitates "valley girl" talk. Finally, Ryan makes an explicit judgment about gay-sounding men as potential dating partners.

His first negative assessment precedes the assessed. In line 17 when he starts to say what he "really can't stand." He doesn't actually, specifically name what it is that he can't stand until several lines later in line 29. Previous to this, he positively assesses a man's masculinity in line 22, when he says "he looks great and stuff like that" and then proceeds to describe him as "all masculine and shit" and having "this whole Kurt Cobain thing going on" (line 25). Masculinity in a partner is highly desirable for Ryan. The negative assessment in line 17 is in reference to meeting this Cobain-esque man whose speech was highly feminine. His speech was so feminine

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in fact, that Ryan describes it as "a purse just hit me in the forehead as soon as he opened his mouth" (line 29). Being "way queenier in person than… on his profile" (line 33) is precisely what Ryan "really can't stand."

Bruce Rodgers' somewhat dated "The Queens' Vernacular: a Gay Lexicon" has the following definition: "designation among male homosexuals for one another. Generally, a queen is thought of as the fellow who plucks his eyebrows, splashes on Chanel No. 5, etc…" (1972, 164). Rodgers' definition here focuses on stereotypically feminine activities, such as detailed personal grooming and wearing fragrance (particularly Chanel No. 5, a quintessentially feminine fragrance [but note that Brad Pitt famously became the first male to advertise the scent]). *Queen* on its own maintains the feminine overtones, but when compounded often loses its feminine qualities (cf. butch-queen, rice-queen).

To illustrate the femininity of a gay man named *queen*, I offer the following joke I heard years and years ago, and which has made the round via e-mail and appeared on the internet hoax-busting website Snopes.com: on a trans-Atlantic flight, the pilot has made the final announcement in preparation for landing in the US. The flight attendants are moving through the plane, reminding passengers to return their seats and tray tables to the upright positions, and so forth. One glamorous woman in first class is unwilling to comply with the directives and continues to read her glossy magazine. One of the flight attendants, who is quite obviously gay, minces by to remind her politely to put her tray table up. The woman pointedly ignores him, to which he responds more firmly, "Ma'am, you're going to have to put the tray table up now as we're getting ready to land." Annoyed, she turns her face up to him and responds, "In my country, I am a princess and I am not accustomed to taking orders from employees." The flight attendant's face grows stormy and then bright as he quickly reaches down to snatch up the

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magazine. "Yeah? Well, in my country, I'm a queen and I outrank you, bitch. So, put the tray table up!"

While we might say that Ryan's preferences are specific to him, that he openly and unashamedly claims disinterest in feminine men indicates that his preferences are acceptable at least to some people. In fact, there is a long history of exclusion of feminine men from potential dating pools as any casual look at gay dating ads either in print or on-line in mobile apps or other social networks like Craigslist or Gay.com will attest. "No fats, no fems" is a very common requirement in such advertisements. Being feminine, specifically, is incompatible with acceptable gayness and thus not an appropriate characteristic for a potential partner.

In the first group session, Nunu stated a clear preference for masculine men as partners. Richard's immediate response was to ask whether Nunu considered him masculine, which Nunu affirmed. By itself, this question might not seem remarkable except to add that earlier in the conversation when discussing an incident in which Richard was the victim of homophobic verbal harassment in Pittsburgh, I remarked that he didn't look gay to me and Nathan and Nunu agreed.

Transcript 8. Group 1: Richard doesn't look gay.

```
 1  K          where was that
 2  Richard    South Side
 3  K          uh-huh
 4  K          [1.9] I've heard the South Side is not su:per:::
                accommodating
 5  Richard    no it's not at all
 6  Richard    [0.5] and
 7  K          it's like really bro-y?
 8  Richard    it's very bro-y (creak)
 9  Richard    [0.7] and
10  Richard    [0.6] heh like
11  Richard    like I dress like very bro-y like
12  Richard    baggy pa::nts like
13  Richard    big t-shirt:
14  Richard    [0.9] but like
15  Richard    [1.8] [I like
16  Nunu       it's the walk]
17  Nunu       (laughter)
18  Richard    huh?
```

```
19 Nunu        the walk
20 Richard     [the walk
21 K           it's the walk]
22 Richard     [0.7] the walk
23 K           [that's what gave you away
24 Richard     I think it has to be]
25 Nathan      (laughter)
26 Richard     (laughter)
27 K           [0.9] yeah because I was going to say I don't like
28 K           [0.8] actually like
29 K           [0.6] you I don't think either of you guys look gay to
               me
30 Nunu        [1.2] I wouldn't think so neither
31 Nunu        I would think like he plays soccer:
32 K           [uh-huh
33 Richard     yeah]
34 Nunu        you know you're like that typical all American
               girlfriend
35 Nathan      [(laughter)
36 Richard     (laughter)
37 Nunu        (laughter)]
38 Nunu        I would never think that
```

Richard's and my shared assessment of the Southside, the neighborhood where the incident took place, as "bro-y" marks it as a space for bros. The term "bro" is used derogatorily to refer to young, straight, white, middle-class men who are stereotypically inarticulate, obsessed with young women, and often belligerently drunk. They are seen to be hyper-concerned with their masculinity, thus their focus on women, the consumption of large amounts of alcohol, modified trucks, and upward economic mobility. Thus, the Southside is a straight, masculine space.

Richard objects to his identification as a "faggot" by passers-by as gay due to his style of dress that conforms to those of the men in the Southside (lines 11-13). Nunu's interruption in line 16, attributing his identification as gay to his walk, appears to confuse Richard. He asks Nunu to repeat himself and then repeats "the walk" to himself, perhaps trying to understand. On the other hand, he may be considering Nunu's statement, a suspicion supported by my explanation of Nunu's assertion in lines 21 and 23: "It's the walk. That's what gave you away."

To give something away is a phrase used to describe the revelation of something that would otherwise remain hidden. In this case, Richard's passing as straight was betrayed by his gay style of walking. Richard's agreement following the explanation in line 24 elicits shared laughter and finally my evaluation that Richard and Nathan don't look gay to me.

But this assertion takes three lines and several long pauses to verbalize, which I attribute to my initial desire to say simply that Richard didn't look gay. Remembering Nathan and not wanting to leave him out, I added him to my statement with the expression "actually, like" in 28 before being explicit that "you- I don't think either of you guys look gay to me." The use of "either" here limits the expression to just two people—Nathan and Richard—to the exclusion of Nunu, whose feminine appearance would result in either a female percept or a trans percept.

Nunu's agreement with my statement is interesting because the two example characteristics he gives are that Richard looks like he plays soccer or is "that typical, all-American [boyfriend]" (I believe Nunu misspoke and meant actually to say "boyfriend," even more so because his final line is to evaluate and say "I would never think [that you were gay if I were to see you on the street]") in line 38.

Being noticeably gay is not a positive quality for homonormative gay men; part of the homonormative project is to be indistinguishable from heterosexual couples in all but sex, so calling attention to any deviation from the expected masculine men (whether they be in a relationship with a woman or a man) risks derision. The participants in this project shared a concern that they were identifiably gay via their body language or speech. Richard's asking the group later in the discussion even after the discussion in the aforementioned transcript is indication of his concern. I asked Oscar whether he knew what a gay voice sounded like and he said that my speech made me sound gay.

        Transcript 9. Oscar says he can tell I'm gay.

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```
 1  K        do you know what I mean if I say:
 2  K        gay voice
 3  K        or gay accent
 4  Oscar    yes
 5  Oscar    kind of
 6  K        what is it
 7  Oscar    [1.8] I wouldn't be able to define it
 8  Oscar    but like
 9  K        yeah
10  Oscar    I can tell you're gay?
11  K        uh-huh
12  Oscar    like no offense
13  K        no
```

Oscar's long pause in line 7 of almost two seconds may be due to his inability to provide a definition since not answering someone's question as he or she expects it to be answered constitutes a dispreferred second-pair part. He hedges in line 8 before saying that he is able to identify my sexuality from my speech in line 10. He utters "I can tell you're gay" with rising intonation, indicating uncertainty or an unwillingness to commit completely to the truth of the statement, which might allow the listener to more easily reject his statement. Finally, he offers the pseudo-apology in line 12 "no offense," a shortened form of a longer phrase such as "I mean you no offense." He even precedes this with the hedge "like." All of these linguistic strategies employed by Oscar simply to tell me that my voice reflects my gay identity lend support for my claim that overtly identifying another person as gay is potentially face-threatening, especially when one attributes that identification to behavior or speech.

Robert expresses concern over his speech and whether it sounds gay. During our discussion about gay voices, I asked Robert if he thought that my speech sounded gay and he seemed uncomfortable identifying it as such. Further, he expressed concern over his own speech and whether it sounded gay.

Transcript 10. Robert says I have a gay voice.

```
 1  K        do you think I have a gay voice or a gay accent
 2  K        [1.1] you can be[ honest
```

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 3  Robert     I mean] I think
 4  Robert     yeah
 5  Robert     yeah a little bit
 6  K          yeah
 7  K          [0.5] I think I do too
 8  K          [1.2] that's why I used to get hit on all the time at
                the call center
 9  K          by only men never women
10  Robert     do you think I have one?
11  Robert     [1.0] even a little bit
12  K          uh-uh
13  Robert     okay
```

Robert's silence after my initial question in line 1 may have prompted me to exhort his honesty in line 2. His fairly quiet "yeah" and "yeah, a little bit" answers indicate a lack of strong commitment to his assessment. It is possible that Robert truly thinks my voice is only "a little bit" gay-sounding and that is why he avoids more certain and committed responses such as "yes" or "definitely." My own and other acquaintances' and friends' opinions hold that my voice does indeed sound gay, which leads me to interpret Robert's responses in line 4 and 5 and not uncertain but rather hedged to soften what might be a face-threatening assertion: you sound gay. Robert does not respond to my agreement with his assessment or my evidence for it based on my experience working in call centers, but rather asks whether I think he has "one" (line 10), here referring to a gay voice or gay accent. The one second pause in line 10 leads Robert to exhort my honesty in the same way I did his in line 2; Robert wants me to tell him if his voice is "even a little bit" gay. I interpret this as insecurity over his own voice and a desire to not be identifiably gay from his speech. Ryan also described my voice as gay-sounding, but not without hedging his statement like Robert.

Transcript 11. Ryan says I have a gay voice.

```
 1  K          so if I asked you
 2  K          if I said something about a gay voice or a gay accent
 3  K          do you know what I'm talking about?
 4  Ryan       mmm (affirmative)
```

```
5  K          what would you say it is?
6  Ryan       [0.4] umm
7  Ryan       [0.4] well you kind of have one
8  K          uh-huh
```

Ryan also hesitates before describing my voice as gay, pausing twice for almost half a second and buying time in lines 6 and 7. He hedges his statement with one of the classic markers of an upcoming face-threatening comment "well" and also uses the softener "kind of" before referring to a gay voice indirectly with the pronoun "one." Ryan described the gay voice as higher pitched and sounding "like a valley girl" and has also expressed distaste for feminine gay men as potential partners, referring to them as "hard-core queeny" and referring to one date's speech as having been like "a purse hit [him] in the forehead." For Ryan, then, to describe my own voice as gay and feminine is a potential insult. This explains his hedging and relative indirectness in ascribing gay characteristics to my speech.

In this section I have outlined the negative attitudes these men have toward femininity as a habitual characteristic for themselves, other gay men, and their potential partners. In some cases the participants express very strong preferences for masculine men over feminine men (Richard, Nunu, and Ryan).

In particular, gay-sounding speech, which all of them claimed to recognize and some produced short segments of it on command, was especially negatively assessed. Almost all of the participants characterized it as feminine in some way, be it via adjectives like "high-pitched" or "flamboyant," or through direct comparisons to feminine speakers such as cheerleaders and Valley Girls. None of them easily identified my speech as gay, not because they were unable to make a judgment, but because they seemed unwilling to commit themselves to a statement that could be interpreted as an insult.

When the participants did indicate that they themselves exhibited feminine behaviors, especially as it relates to gay-sounding speech, they clearly delimited the contexts in which this might occur to funny, absurd, or rare occasions—in short, ad hoc performances that were not reflective of their permanent or habitual activities.

5.4   GAY LIFE TRAJECTORY

Part of the homonormative script involves the common understanding that gay men's lives follow the ugly duckling story in their transformation from awkward, closeted adolescent to finally finding happiness and liberation via the coming-out story. Kath Weston's 1995 article "Get Thee to a Big City: Sexual Imaginary and the Great Gay Migration" explores the topic of rural incompatibility with gayness and the naturalness of gay men moving to large cities to find freedom of expression. Although she discusses mostly transplants from rural areas of the US to the San Francisco Bay Area and she is keenly critical of the fictive black-and-white considerations of the city and country as wholly separate, Weston underscores the importance of geography to the gay and lesbian people she spoke to. Some of them mentioned that coming-out or even considering one's self as gay wasn't possible due to the rural surroundings of their upbringing. One of the men she spoke to, who grew up in rural Pennsylvania, recounted the following to her.

> I had what I've discovered since then is a very common syndrome. I *very* much had that feeling of "I'm the only one."… I've heard a lot of people say that since then. Especially people who were not in a city where they could see other people around. They were out in the suburbs or the sticks or the boonies or something. It's like, "Gee, there's no other gay people around me. I've never *seen* another gay person. I've got to be the only one on the face of the earth!" (281, original ellipsis and emphases)

Although the men I spoke to did not express similar feelings of loneliness at home, they sometimes spoke of their homes in suburbia or rural areas as confining or hostile to themselves or gay people in general. Of interest here is the choice of article as appended to *city* and *suburbs*. As Weston's participant said, he knows a lot of people who have also said that they felt alone, "[e]specially people who were not in *a* city… [t]hey were out in *the* suburbs or *the* sticks or *the* boonies…" (281, my emphasis). The indefinite article used to preface *city* indicates that for this speaker it doesn't matter which city because any city will be a place welcoming to gays. Presumably here, the word *city* is calling to mind major metropolitan areas such as New York City, San Francisco, or Atlanta, and not technical cities like Flint (Michigan) which, while cities in name, have less in common with the large, bustling metropolises previously mentioned than they do with less cosmopolitan areas. On the other hand, this participant offers three different descriptors for places of gay loneliness: the suburbs, the sticks, the boonies. Here, the definite article *the* is applied to all of them, even in their plural forms, serving to homogenize them. All non-urban areas have in common the same invisibility of gay men and resultant alone-ness of those who do live there.

Similarly, Nathan reflects these ideas of loneliness in rural Pennsylvania during his high school when discussing another gay classmate. Additionally, this excerpt reflects homonormative expectations of relative secularity and self-awareness about one's sexuality and identity.

Transcript 12. Group 1: Nathan on the inevitability of coming-out.

```
1  Nathan    I know that
2  Nathan    uh is
3  Nathan    [1.4] there was this kid in my high school who was
             like
4  Nathan    [0.5] most popular kid
5  Nathan    umm
6  Nathan    [0.7] he just
7  Nathan    super musically talented everyone loved him
8  Nathan    it turned out
```

```
9  Nathan    [0.6] I think
10 Nathan    [0.8] like a year ago last August
11 Nathan    he came-out to me
12 Nathan    cuz like I think
13 Nathan    from the area I came from I was [the only person that
                 was out
14 Richard   (laughter)]
15 Nathan    [0.7] there were a lot more that came-out when they
                 left
16 Nathan    but
17 Nathan    [1.0] it was a scary area
18 Nathan    umm
19 Nathan    [1.0] and like he was telling me this
20 Nathan    [0.8] and
21 Nathan    I was trying to like help him
22 Nathan    work on telling people and start to come-out
23 Nathan    [0.7] and he was just so resistant
24 Nathan    because like he comes like
25 Nathan    the popularity thing
26 Nathan    really played into it
27 Nathan    cuz he just wanted to maintain his image and he
                 thought that that would hurt it a lot
28 Nathan    and he comes from a really really religious family and
                 goes to a Christian school and he wants to become a
                 minister
29 Nathan    and I know that he's gonna end up marrying a woman and
                 [having kids
30 K         mmmmm] (falling intonation)
31 Nathan    and then being that minister that comes-out at fifty
                 and it's just because he's hiding?
32 K         yeah
33 Nathan    and thinks that he can change
34 Nathan    but [he can't
35 K         uh-hm]
36 K         [0.8] so he came-out to you as a gay guy?
37 Nathan    yep
38 K         and he still wants to get married and become a
39 Nathan    [he's uh
40 K         minister?]
41 Nathan    he's he's dated two girls since then
42 Richard   (laughter)
43 Nathan    (laughter)
44 K         I mean I guess it would be easy not to have sex with
                 them
45 Nathan    yeah
46 K         if you're [waiting for marriage
47 Richard   (laughter)
48 Nathan    waiting for marriage] and stuff
49 Nunu      yeah
```

Nathan's narrative describes a well-liked high school student as the "most popular kid" who was "super musically talented; everyone loved him" (lines 4 and 7). His superlative descriptions paint the picture of a well-adjusted student with a broad social circle, which contrasts strongly with gay discourses about life as a gay adolescent.

To this end, the "It Gets Better" campaign initiated by Dan Savage to help prevent LGBT teen suicide is an important example. The internet videos consist of recorded messages made by successful adult LGBT people—many who are famous celebrities—delivering heartfelt messages of patience to gay youth who are suffering at the hands of bullies and heterosexist systems and assumptions. These videos aim to give depressed and suicidal teenagers hope that if they can just get through their ugly duckling years as an adolescent, they can enter into full-fledged gay adulthood with its corollary benefits of sexual enlightenment, consumerism, monogamy, and inevitable state recognition of their relationships. Nathan's classmate, however, does not need the "It Gets Better" message because he is a well-adjusted teenager.

Nathan previews the complication to this story in line 8 by saying "it turned out." This phrase indicates an unexpected result, as in a story about someone's sudden death which "turned out" to be due to an undiagnosed heart murmur. Nathan uses this phrase to give his audience a clue that there is a twist to the story coming up: his classmate's gayness. Lines 9 and 10, with their long pauses and extraneous information about when the event occurred, further serve to build anticipation before the climax in line 11: "he came-out to me." What is so unexpected or surprising about this story is that Nathan's classmate defies the standard script of gay adolescence; rather than be bullied or socially outcast, the classmate is popular and well-liked. That he is also gay conflicts with this script and Nathan's speech reflects this conflict.

In lines 23-27, we learn that Nathan's classmate was "just so resistant" to coming-out because he "just wanted to maintain his image and he thought that that would really hurt it a lot." So not only do gay adolescents suffer socially for their identities in high school, but Nathan's classmate is aware that the revelation of gayness can cause a loss of reputation even for someone who is generally well-liked.

Nathan surmises that he was the chosen interlocutor for coming-out because he "was the only person that was out" (line 13) and that "it was a scary area" (17). He claims authority to make the assessment in line 17 about his hometown because he was the only out gay adolescent at his school, even though others "came-out when they left" (line 15). This reflects homonormative scripts about ugly ducklings in an unfriendly place who will eventually make it to a more accommodating city once their trial by fire has ended.

Nathan goes on to describe a classmate in further incongruity with the expected homonormative development from awkward, un-liked adolescent to enlightened, secular adult. Lines 28 – 31 are Nathan's projection for his classmate's future: pursuing ministry, heterosexual marriage, and biological parenthood before revealing his gayness in middle-age. This projected life path is a common trope, as evidenced by Nathan's use of the resultative "end up marrying a woman and having kids," indicating the inevitability of his heterosexual marriage.

Further, his use of the deictic "that" in line 31 ("that minister that comes out at fifty") refers to an object either close to the listener ("Hand me that pair of scissors.") or an object known to both speaker and listener ("You know that gas station at Penn and Peebles?"). "That minister" named by Nathan is a stereotypical character in broader discourse, similar to how a student might complain about a professor who administers unfair tests: "He's that prof that tests people on material not covered in class."

Nathan's story and predictions are not alien to me or Richard. My falling intonation over the nasal utterance "mmmmm" in line 30 serves as a backchannel to indicate my continued attention after Nathan holding the floor exclusively for 15 lines. Lines 32 and 35 ("yeah" and "uh-hm," respectively) are positive assessments to Nathan's predictions on his classmate's life. Richard and Nathan both laugh at the idea of this classmate dating "two girls since" his coming-out (line 41) further indicate a shared sense of amusement at the classmate's naïveté, because, as Nathan puts it earlier in the transcript: "he's hiding [his gayness]" (line 31).

Finally, this excerpt ends with a joke poking fun at the sexual conservativism of religious people (lines 44 and 46) and Nathan's classmate denying his sexuality. At work in the successful interpretation of this joke is the knowledge that one of the most powerful indicators of gayness is sexual activity with another man, and additionally a lack of desire for sexual activity with women. In the case of Nathan's gay classmate dating girls, the ubiquitous advice, admonitions, and commands to not engage in premarital sex—notoriously unsuccessful for many adolescents—will be easy to obey because he won't have any natural desire to do so with these girls. Richard's laughter in line 47, Nunu's agreement "yeah" in line 49, and Nathan's echoing my words "waiting for marriage" in line 48 are all indications that this joke has been successfully interpreted by the group.

In this transcript, I have shown how Nathan's discussion of his classmate is informed by dominant homonormative scripts of troubled gay adolescence culminating in cathartic coming-out and eventual liberal, liberated adulthood. Nathan's classmate defies the expected life trajectory and his language reflects this deviation in its building of suspense and references to the ugly duckling trope itself.

After this change from awkward adolescent to confident gay adult man, the next expected life moment parallels that of heteronormative couples: marriage. I also asked the participants whether they saw themselves forming long-term relationships in the future with someone. Although only one of them expressed absolute certainty that he would be married, they others all said that they anticipated getting "married" in the future, supplying the concept of marriage when I didn't. At the time of the recordings (early 2012), eight states and the District of Columbia performed same-sex marriages, so that same-sex marriages were becoming more and more commonplace. None of the participants expressed certainty regarding children; this topic usually followed the discussion of marriage and it was not always I who introduced it.

That a question about long-term relationships prompted these men to discuss marriage and children reflects their sensitivity to homonormative expectations of marriage and child-rearing, which in turn reflects the heteronormative life trajectory: college, home-ownership, marriage, and parenthood.

5.5 BLACK SPEAKERS

In the preceding sections, I have demonstrated that the white participants in my study are keenly familiar with homonormative scripts that both license and regulate gay men's sexualities in terms of a homonormative model. Gayness, at least for white men, is appropriate so long as it is enacted within certain boundaries of acceptability. For example, while a public gay identity acknowledges at least the desire for same-sex sexual activity, such activity must ideally take place between two monogamous, committed partners (despite stereotypes to the contrary). In language characterized by negative assessment, Edward and Richard distance themselves from

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an image of sexual promiscuity even when their habits involve practices known to be primarily sexual in nature—that is, despite Grindr and Scruff's reputations as hook-up apps, these men have accounts and have used these apps to meet men but give specific descriptions of the men and relationships that have ensued as not strictly sexual either through longer-term romantic and sexual relationships or as licensed through platonic friends.

Initially, I expected to find significant differences between the white and black participants in language choice. This expectation stemmed from my own anecdotal observation that gay communities that I frequented in several US locations (south east Michigan, north Texas, and south western Pennsylvania) tended to be dominated by white members to the exclusion of men of color. In all three places, African Americans constitute an important minority, as do Hispanic or Latino men in north Texas; their absence from gatherings of the gay community in these locales was notable. Further, my own and others' reports that they knew very few gay men of color reinforced my impression that the gay community was ethnically homogeneous. Owing to this and a general dearth of research on gay men of color's language use, my expectation was that white and black gay men would constitute distinct communities of practice and thus employ distinct language in the creation and representation of these communities.

Instead, all of the black men I interviewed participated similarly to the white men in the linguistic practices that I have analyzed thus far. Indeed, some of the most noteworthy transcripts and examples supporting my claims that these eight men are familiar with, respond to, and at times identify with characteristics of homonormativity come from interactions with black participants.

For example, Robert's coming-out story, while he may have initially denied having one, retells the first public naming of his sexuality to the two most salient people in his life at that time: his parents. In Robert's sharing of his coming-out story with me and with the other participants in the group session, two claims are made, both of which align Robert with gayness. The first claim is a claim of gay identity as reflected in his coming-out story. By telling me that he came-out to his parents, he simultaneously comes-out to me. The second claim is to gay story-telling practices; Robert's coming-out story is a response to a specific request and his performance fits the mold of what is expected. Typically, straight men do not have coming-out stories because of they lack the need to come-out, so having a coming-out story at all is a marker of community membership. Thus, when gay men share their coming-out stories, they are coming-out at the moment of the telling and they are demonstrating community involvement.

Ryan also produced an abbreviated coming-out story. When I asked him whether he was out to his parents, he said he was. In response to my "how did that go?" question, Ryan simply stated that he deliberately left traces of the gay pornography he'd been viewing on the computer for his parents to discover. He did not provide any further details, but simply said that it sparked a confrontation. Ryan's sole remark was to comment on the atypicality of his father being more accepting of his gayness than his mother: "…[my dad] kind of took my coming-out better than my mom did, which is really ironic." By labeling his father's greater acceptance as ironic—contrary to expectations—Ryan alludes to the stereotype that mothers are more accepting of their sons' gayness than fathers are. In doing so, Ryan demonstrates familiarity with the coming-out genre of narratives. Oscar's introduction to his coming-out story offers further evidence of this trope, in which he says, "honestly, normally, it's the other way around, but I don't think my dad cares too much about me being gay." Although Oscar's parents' varying degrees of acceptance

are related to his mother's devout Catholicism, Oscar here acknowledges the same trend that Ryan does: mothers are generally less bothered by their sons' gayness than fathers.

Lucas, however, is different. As mentioned previously, he didn't recount as coherent a coming-out story. At the very least, his story was much less rehearsed than the others', but I interpret his hesitance as either unwillingness to share or an inability to provide the expected narrative. His mother knows that he is gay and he provided vague memories of confirming her suspicion when she asked him (in the same way that Ryan confirmed his parents' suspicions after they encountered the internet search history that he deliberately left to their discovery). So it can be said that an event during which he disclosed or confirmed his gay identity to his mother occurred, which is the minimal set of instances that must take place in order for a coming-out to have taken place. Beyond that is unclear—for example, whether she accepts his gayness.

But Lucas did not take part in the coming-out story telling event with me. In this, he does not align himself with the other participants and the vast majority of gay men that I know and have encountered and those who have been mentioned in the literature discussing the coming-out genre. Instead, I can surmise that he either does not view me as a community member privy to this information, or he doesn't have the same sets of expectations and values about the coming-out story as other gay men do. Lucas, on the other hand, does not produce a coherent coming-out story. His hesitant and uncertain responses to my questions indicate either his unwillingness or his inability to recount his coming-out to his mother, although he is out to both his mother and step-father.

Transcript 13. Lucas' coming-out.

```
1  K         so are you I can't remember
2  K         are you out to your mom?
3  Lucas     [1.1] it's complicate-
4  Lucas     I think she's in denial:
5  K         okay
```

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6  K          [0.4] can you tell me about it?
7  Lucas      [0.5] umm (high pitch)
8  Lucas      [1.2] like
9  Lucas      [1.3] I don't know we:
10 Lucas      [1.7] it's kind of like we don't really talk about it?
              ever?
11 Lucas      but like
12 Lucas      [0.5] and she'll be like
13 Lucas      so what about like grandchildren
14 Lucas      and I'm just like you're talking to the wrong son
15 Lucas      and then she like won't say anything after that
16 K          uh-hm
17 Lucas      or like she won't be like
18 Lucas      [0.7] or she'll be like oh
19 Lucas      [1.2] umm
20 Lucas      [0.7] so do you have a girlfriend? or
21 Lucas      [1.2] whatever?
22 Lucas      and I'm just like
23 Lucas      [1.0] wh- why would you ask
24 Lucas      [1.0] that
25 Lucas      [0.8] like that
26 Lucas      (laughter)
27 Lucas      so I don't know she doesn't
28 Lucas      I don't think she wants to talk about it
29 K          uh-hm
30 Lucas      I don't know I don't really
31 Lucas      [1.4] I don't know
32 Lucas      [2.4] uh my family's really weird
33 Lucas      (laughter)
34 K          did you come-out to her?
35 Lucas      [1.1] like when was it
36 Lucas      [2.0] I: did?
37 Lucas      but like not of my own will?
38 K          okay
39 K          [what happened
40 Lucas      so]
41 Lucas      [0.5] umm I- what did happen
42 Lucas      I don't really remember cause I was like really angry
43 Lucas      so I like tried to forget it
44 K          mmm
45 Lucas      but like something happened
46 Lucas      we got in a huge argument and then she like
47 Lucas      [1.7] out
48 Lucas      she like asked me and I was like yeah
49 Lucas      [0.6] and then I-
50 Lucas      and then
51 Lucas      [1.2] she was like
52 Lucas      [1.6] I don't know what she s-
53 Lucas      she like
54 Lucas      was more hurt that like I didn't say it before [and I
              just
55 K          um-hm]
```

```
56 Lucas      I was just like well you didn't like give me a good
57 Lucas      opportunity
58 Lucas      [0.8] and like other
59 Lucas      stuff
60 Lucas      I don't know
61 Lucas      [0.8] and like we just
62 Lucas      I don't think we ever talked about it
63 Lucas      for real after that
64 Lucas      she's just been like in denial
65 Lucas      she's like I just want you to be happy
66 Lucas      and I'm just like then don't
67 Lucas      [0.9] put me in awkward situations
68 K          right?
69 Lucas      (laughter)
70 K          right?
71 K          [did
72 Lucas      when] oh
73 K          when she asked you did she say are you gay?
74 Lucas      [2.0] she didn't say it just
75 Lucas      she was like
76 Lucas      [1.7] what did she say I don't really remember the
            conversation
77 Lucas      it was kind of like
78 Lucas      [2.1] I- she- I don't think she
79 Lucas      explicitly used the word gay but I was like yeah
80 Lucas      like she was just like
81 Lucas      do you like men [or something like that
82 K          mmmmm]
83 Lucas      and I was like yes
84 Lucas      it was something along the lines of that
85 K          uh-hm
```

My opening question in lines 1 and 2 can be read as a request for a coming-out story, although Lucas answers the questions literally by describing his mother's denial of the fact of his gayness. My questions for more detail become increasingly direct, ranging from "can you tell me about it?" (line 6) and "what happened?" (line 39) to "when she asked you [whether you were gay], did she say 'Are you gay?'?" Despite this, Lucas does not provide a coming-out story complete with orientation, conflict, and resolution.

Lucas' speech in this portion of conversation is characterized by ubiquitous and lengthy pauses, which are classic resources employed to delay a dispreferred second-pair part; for example, lines 18 through 25 all contain pauses of about a second each. Further, Lucas'

repetition of "I don't know" (lines 9, 27, 31, 42, 60, and twice in 30) casts his statements as extremely uncertain, and distances himself from authority over the following utterance. In lines 27-28, Lucas finishes responding to me request for more information ("Can you tell me about it?" in line 6) by indicating that his mother doesn't want to talk about his gayness. My backchannel "uh-hm" in line 29 indicates that he still holds the floor and can continue speaking, but his repetitious "I don't know I don't really... I don't know" in lines 30 and 31 followed by the lines "uh, my family's really weird" and laughter resemble common evaluation tactics to close a narrative.

However, so far Lucas has described his mother asking questions that could lead to a coming-out but don't necessarily need to. Her question about his giving her grandchildren presupposes a heterosexual relationship and narratives of straight marriage and reproduction. However, Lucas' response that she's "talking to the wrong son" (line 14) is ambiguous and does not constitute in this case an unambiguous coming-out (for several reasons: gay men can sire children, not all straight people or couples have children, etc.). Similarly, a negative answer to his mother's asking about a girlfriend (line 20) does not necessarily indicate his gayness.

Since Lucas thus far in this sample has not unambiguously declared his gayness to his mother, he hasn't produced a coming-out story, yet. This explains then my persistence in line 34: "did you come-out to her?" His two responses to the question, preceded by long pauses, indicate uncertainty or unwillingness to respond. Asking for further detail, hoping to provoke a narrative, my question in line 39 "What happened?" is similarly unsuccessful in prompting Lucas to produce a coming-out narrative.

The rest of this transcript is characterized by false starts (lines 61 and 62: "And, like, we just- I don't think we every talked about it...," Lucas asking himself questions as if trying to

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coax a stubborn memory to verbalize (lines 74–76: "She didn't say it just- she was like- what did she say? I don't really remember the conversation."), and hedges to indicate a lack of commitment to the proposition. For example, it isn't until the last few lines of the transcript that Lucas produces a direct quote from his coming-out. In line 80, he introduces his mother's question before repeating her question in the following line: "Like, she was just like 'Do you like men?' or something like that." Lucas does not offer bald quotes as other participants did, but rather qualifies his quote as approximating his mother's question. Even in his own quoted affirmative response to the question (line 83): "and I was like 'yes'," he again distances himself from any verbatim interpretation of his repetition of the speech by qualifying the entire exchange as having been "something along the lines of that" (line 84).

Lucas' narrative lacks the level of detail seen in Richard's, Nathan's, Edward's, Oscar's, Robert's, and to some extent Ryan's and Nunu's stories. Lucas doesn't provide direct quotes without hedging nor does he give an approximate age at which the coming-out took place. I can posit three reasons for this: the first is that he just doesn't remember the particulars of his coming-out to his mother. The second is that he didn't come-out to her and so he doesn't have a coming-out story, and the third is that he didn't want to share the story with me perhaps out of lack of rapport, lack of trust, fear of judgment, or other reasons relating to privacy.

As for the first possible reason, it is unusual indeed that Lucas doesn't recall the specific details of his coming-out to his mother. This genre of story is so salient to men in the gay community, and especially given her present discomfort with the topic (Lucas states twice that he believes her to be in denial), it seems unlikely that Lucas would forget such an interaction. While it is not impossible that he doesn't recall the particular words exchanged or when the

discussion took place, his lack of specificity is notable in itself, particularly in light of the other participants' direct quotes of themselves and their parents, offered without qualification.

The second possibility is that Lucas has not had an explicit coming-out discussion with his mom. Again, given her lack of comfort with his sexuality and her seeming willful ignorance (in lines 13 and 20, Lucas says she asks him about grandchildren and having a girlfriend, two life situations linked closely with a heteronormative narrative), it is possible that although Lucas has responded affirmatively to his mother's suspicions about his sexuality, she has not "heard" him.

The question remains, though, as to why Lucas wouldn't just explain either of these, and I suspect it may have something to do with the stigma about not being out. As Nathan's narrative of his high school classmate's attempts to keep his sexuality secret and maintain a heterosexual public image reveals, not being out is considered by some to be dishonest. In addition to being dishonest, a gay man who is not out at least to his family is not considered a potential dating partner, according to some of my participants. When I asked them what they looked for in a potential partner, or if we discussed "deal breakers" (characteristics that make the possibility of a relationship impossible), not being out was mentioned just as frequently as "heavy drug use," as Oscar put it (by this, I take it to mean that alcohol and marijuana are acceptable or tolerable, but cocaine, heroin, or meth are deal breakers). Although Lucas certainly did not consider me a potential dating partner, not being out continues to carry significant social stigma among many gay men.

This stigma is also related to the coming-out story as one of the most pivotal moments in a gay man's ugly duckling story. The conversion from awkward, unpopular, closeted gay adolescent to the confident, popular, out homonormative adult hinges on having coming-out in which the gay man declares his public identity and begins overt affiliation with the gay

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community. Being closeted precludes one from homonormativity, an identity that I took for granted in myself and my participants.

Finally, there is the possibility that Lucas did come-out to his mother and remembers well the story but he was unwilling to share the story with me for any number of reasons. While this is possible, I consider it to be a small possibility due to my knowing Lucas fairly well in both an academic and a personal context even outside of the scope of this dissertation research. Still, I have noted Lucas' personality to be somewhat reserved, and he is less comfortable discussing taboo topics (such as politics, religion, and sex) than many of my other friends and some of the other participants. Again, even if this is the case, it is remarkable because the other seven men who took part in my dissertation fieldwork were very willing to share their coming-out stories with me, as well as other stories of a more personal or potentially offensive nature (such as explicit discussions of sex, drug use, and illegal activities).

Despite Lucas' lack of a coming-out story that paralleled the other participants' stories, Lucas still generated a large amount of talk that reflected homonormative ideals. For example, in a discussion from the second group meeting, Lucas makes a light-hearted joke at Ryan's expense during a conversation about men with overly narrow preferences in sexual or romantic partners. Ryan agrees that these narrow-minded men are irritating, especially because they seem to be sexually successful despite the small size of their potential dating or hooking-up pool.

Transcript 14. Group 2: Sexual droughts.

```
1  Robert     I hate people like that
2  Lucas      yeah I'm just like what are you thinking
3  Ryan       exactly
4  Lucas      like
5  Ryan       and yet they always get laid I don't get it
6  Lucas      [1.1] no-- yeah [that's true
7  Ryan       where it's like]
8  Ryan       where it's like with me it's like
9  Ryan       I have like no particular preferences it just depends
              on the guy
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10 Ryan      and it's like I haven't had sex in over in almost two
               months
11 K          uh-hm
12 Lucas      (laughter)
13 Ryan       [so it's like
14 Lucas      I've heard] longer records but okay
15 Ryan       [(laughter)
16 Robert     (laughter)
17 K          (laughter)
18 Lucas      (laughter)]
```

The successful interpretation of Lucas' joke in line 14 hinges on knowledge about stereotypes of

gay men's supposed promiscuity and the realities that many gay men face and complain to their

peers about: a lack of available partners for dating and/or hooking-up (as proof of this, note the

success and ubiquity of Grindr and Scruff).

Familiarity with the stereotypes that surround gay men's stereotypes allows participants

to tell jokes and interpret others' that are funny on numerous levels. Everyone's shared and

robust laughter in both the above and the following jokes could reflect the unfolding of multiple

levels of interpretation. For example, in an otherwise banal discussion during the same group

meeting about pets, Robert told us about his cat. The attribution of one particular adjective to a

specific name prompted much laughter. Robert's play on naming his cat Sasha and then

describing her as fierce is a form of referencing that the other participants in the discussion

certainly picked up on.

Transcript 15. Group 2: Robert's cat is fierce.

```
1  K          and what's your cat's name?
2  Robert     Sasha
3  K          Sasha
4  K          [0.8] that's a good cat name
5  Robert     she's fierce
6  Robert     ah
7  Robert     [(laughter)
8  K          right
9  Lucas      she's fierce (laughter)
10 Ryan       (laughter)]
11 Robert     she's fierce
12 Robert     she she really is
```

At first glance, it may not be immediately apparent what is so funny about this interaction. Robert has a cat, her name is Sasha and he describes her as fierce. Why the others in the room repeated Robert's line and joined in laughter might be inexplicable to someone without the requisite cultural knowledge. Otherwise, there's nothing particularly funny about a cat named Sasha whose owner describes her as fierce. Understanding the joke, which revolves around the adjective *fierce*, requires some rather eclectic cultural knowledge and it operates on at least two levels, one which is mostly exclusive to gay men.

The face value meaning of *fierce* is either being ferocious or aggressive, or being powerfully intense. Both of these descriptors might be applied to a domestic cat, perhaps the first one more likely than the second. But the first interpretation that I made upon hearing this exchange was the stereotypically flamboyant use of *fierce* by feminine gay men and drag queens to describe someone in a strongly positive way. One's hair, makeup, clothing, or personality might be *fierce*. That the word ends with a sibilant fricative, allowing for exaggerated extensions of its production (corresponding to the gay lisp) only makes it more appropriate for particularly gay uses.

The second interpretation came a moment later for me, when I connected the name of the cat *Sasha* with her descriptor *fierce*, which reminded me of Beyoncé's 2008 third studio album "I Am… Sasha Fierce" which contained the very successful hit singles "Single Ladies (Put a Ring on it)" and "If I Were a Boy." Sasha Fierce is Beyoncé's on-stage alter ego, who is more aggressive, strong, sassy, and sexy than her normal self. Furthermore, Beyoncé is a highly successful pop star with an extremely devoted gay following.

It is not clear to me that Robert intended to make any of these references; perhaps he simply wanted to attribute aggressive ferocity to his cat. Nonetheless, he quickly recognized the

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available interpretations of his utterance and began to laugh in line 7 as the others at the table began reacting to the utterance. Again, it's not clear what aspects of the exchange Lucas and Ryan understood or picked up on (it is possible that there are other interpretations that escape me), but it is clear that they understood the humor of the situation.

Another example of the participants' familiarity with gay stereotypes and homonormative ways of being concerns aging, which for gay men has mixed connotations. On the one hand, popular gay media extoll the virtues of youth and vigor (although the bear community has made inroads in positive associations with middle-aged and gay men). On the other hand, very young gay men in their late teens and early twenties are seen as overly sexual and thus a threat to homonormativity. For example, in Edward's discussion of going out to clubs in Pittsburgh, he indicated that he preferred 5801 to Pegasus. According to Edward, 5801 is "really nice, I think because it's- um, it's somewhat of an older crowd." Because of this age difference, "they're not, like, insane" and they don't try to "hump my leg." For Edward, older guys are not as image- and sex-obsessed as younger gay guys.

In the second group session, I made a joke about being old at the age of thirty. By using hyperbole (line 6) to say that being thirty is close to the end of life, I draw on the stereotype of gay men being obsessed with youth. The other participants pick up on this theme and add their own comments, lampooning the idea that 30 is advanced age.

Transcript 16. Group 2: Gay middle-age.

```
 1  Ryan      yeah my brother's thirty
 2  Ryan      [0.5] well he's turning thirty this year
 3  K         uh-hm
 4  K         [2.0] like me
 5  Lucas     [1.0] (laughter)
 6  K         life is almost over
 7  Ryan      [aww?
 8  Lucas     aww]
 9  K         thirty-
10  K         like gay thirty is the regular fifty
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11 Robert      time for Botox
12 Ryan        [you you'll have to move
13 K           oh my god]
14 K           [(laughter)
15 Robert      (laughter)
16 Lucas       (laughter)]
17 K           [I finally
18 Robert      [you'll just
19 K           I finally just started using moisturizer on my face
            because I'm like
20 K           I have to combat these wrinkles
21 Ryan        [0.9] you'll also have to move to Palm Springs or
            something
```

At first Ryan and Lucas show sympathy for my statement that my life is near its end. Line 10 fits the snowclone "X is the new Y" phrase which takes stereotypical attributes of Y and claims that X now embodies them. Here the assertion is that the social position of a non-gay person at 50 years of age is equal to that of a gay man at 30, which prompts Robert to tell me succinctly: "time for Botox" (line 11). Ryan's call for me to move to Palm Springs (lines 12 and 21) join with Robert's matter of fact statement that cosmetic procedures are in order both echo the stereotype that gay men lose their youth and social capital as they age.

My exclamation in line 13 ("oh my god!") assesses my aging and its natural consequences boldly and negatively. My comment about using moisturizer to prevent wrinkles (lines 19 and 20) hyperbolizes a beauty regime into warfare; moisturizing battles wrinkles. Finally, Ryan's assertion that I move to Palm Springs draws on existing discourses of the deliberate self-ghettoization of gay men. Ryan chooses Palm Springs, a resort town in sunny California famous for its dry, hot climate favored by the late middle-aged people who move there, a large portion of which are gay. Ryan's use of the phrase "you'll also have to" (21) naturalizes moving to Palm Springs as another in a long list of expected or recommended behaviors for older gay men; my ultimate trajectory is to engage in medical cosmetic procedures, pay attention to my facial wrinkles, and move to a desert resort community. In a separate

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conversation, Oscar also showed his familiarity with this stereotype of fast gay aging when he joked that "gay men age twice as fast" as straight men.

It was not just the black participants who reflected this knowledge about the importance of youth for gay men. In the first group session with Richard, Nathan, and Nunu, we were discussing intergenerational communication among gay men when I asked if they'd ever spoken to "old gay guys." Nathan's indicated that he'd had a few conversations with men in their 50s. Later in the conversation, after I asked for the definition of a "blunt," Nathan made a joke about my being too old to understand their slang. Richard added to the joke saying that "in gay years, 30 [my age at the time] is like 55." These ideas about youth and homonormativity are not exclusive to the black participants; rather there is a similar expectation that gay men be young and fit.

The previous transcript exemplifies the ways in which a seemingly mundane interaction and comment can come to reference the group's shared understandings of gay stereotypes and gay icons. Robin Queen's 1998 article on creating queer social networks focuses on the interactions between a group of gay and lesbian friends. While her analysis reveals that both men and women make use of shared assumptions of queerness to build social networks, her findings are directly applicable to the present research question. For example, one excerpt represents a group discussion of how one might ask a stranger about his or her sexual orientation. Rather than explicitly ask a person if he or she were gay or lesbian, instead the group members jointly produce a series of phrases that are coded references to non-straight sexuality, such as "Are you family?", "Where do you like to go out?", and "[Are you a] friend of Dorothy?" (209-210). Queen asserts that the common understanding of these phrases results in the group members' indexing of "their own rightful inclusion in the community of queers. Further, at the level of this

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particular conversation, the seven participants jointly reinforce a sense of social network that rests in large part on their shared queerness" (210).

Like the gay and lesbian participants in Queen's study, the participants in my study also work collaboratively to provide and respond knowingly to similar tropes that call to mind similarities based on homonormativity. In doing so, they claim commonalities with the other participants and me, performing gayness within the normalized borders of homonormativity.

Like all four white participants, Lucas mentioned 5801 when asked about places to go out in Pittsburgh although he qualified this by saying "I don't bar much." The use of "bar" as a verb, presumably to mean going out to bars, was novel to me. While it is possible that "to bar" is a feature of Lucas' idiolect, the possibility also remains that this is a very used among his friends. A few moments later, Lucas indicated that he prefers to go to a local Tex-Mex restaurant which also serves alcohol in an upstairs bar area with his friends and that he goes to this establishment with some regularity. The incongruity between his assertion that he doesn't "bar much" but when he does it's to 5801, and his frequent visits to the Tex-Mex bar leads me to wonder whether "to bar" is restricted to just gay bars. It is possible that Lucas doesn't consider the Tex-Mex bar to be a bar due to its affiliation with a restaurant, for which it is better known (I didn't know that there was a second floor with a bar before hearing this despite having eaten there occasionally). But his use of the verb reminds me of other verb-formations, like "to club," as in to go out to a nightclub to dance and drink and socialize, which my social circle used almost exclusively to refer to gay nightclubs. In any case, Lucas was familiar with several gay nightclubs and bars, even if he only expressed semi-frequent visits to 5801.

Ryan also offered 5801 as an example of places he might go out at night. He also mentioned a number of other places that I was less familiar with at the time but I can now

confirm are gay bars: 941 Saloon, Spin, and Cruze (these last two were also mentioned by Richard, Edward, and Oscar). One of Ryan's complaints about going out to such gay bars is that he is often "approached for one-night stands." Although Ryan was more explicit and open than the other participants about his sex life, including free discussion of his past hook ups, he emphasized that one-night stands do not constitute the way he prefers to meet men, instead meeting men on-line in various sites for gay social-networking, such as Adam4Adam, gay.com, Grindr, and OKCupid, the latter of which he prefers because "it's not as hook-up oriented."

Ryan expanded further on his disappointment with the hypersexuality of some gay men that he has encountered. In our conversation, Ryan told me about his gay co-worker with whom he has a tense relationship. Ryan attributes this to his co-worker's intense focus on sex and Ryan's rejection of this.

Transcript 17. Ryan on gay guys who are only interested in sex.

```
1  Ryan      we were talking about my sexuality and he asked me if
             I was a top or a bottom
2  Ryan      I told him that was none of his damn business
3  K         [uh-huh
4  Ryan      he had] nothing to say to me since then
5  K         uh-huh
6  Ryan      and it's like
7  Ryan      [0.8] it it it it it's like that with all gay guys
             really where it's like
8  Ryan      they only want to be your friend if they want to sleep
             with you
9  K         right
10 Ryan      [0.4] even if they don't make move at you right that
             second
11 Ryan      they'll still
12 Ryan      [0.4] put you on say like cock lay-a-way or whatever
13 K         right yeah that like
14 Ryan      [0.9] [uh-huh
15 K         it's always] umm calculating right?
16 K         like how can I get with him eventually
17 Ryan      or like or like they'll do the whole nice guy bullshit
             that straight guys do so well
18 Ryan      well well they'll just be
19 Ryan      well they'll just pretend to be your friend and be
             your nice guy
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20 Ryan          in hopes that you'll feel obligated to give them a
                 blowjob at some point
21 K             oh yikes
```

The question put to Ryan in line 1 asks about his preference for sexual activity and probably focuses on whether Ryan prefers to penetrate or be penetrated. Additionally, talk about "top" and "bottom" often extends outside of sexual habits to encompass personality traits such as aggressiveness and even femininity. Such a personal question about Ryan's sexual activities is unwelcome from a co-worker, resulting in the strongly worded line 2. In particular, Ryan's inclusion of "damn" to modify "business" strengthens his negative reaction to the question, acting like a negative assessment in the present exchange.

The generalization that Ryan offers in line 7 that this kind of exchange focusing on sexual activity from gay men is commonplace "it's like that with all gay guys" others hypersexual men and creates distance between Ryan and these men who avoid platonic relationships, opting only for sexual relationships with men (lines 7 and 8). His continued reference to these men with the third person plural pronoun "they" continues to separate him from this group of men and their behaviors, in contrast to his ample usage of first person plural pronouns in other discussions of gay men. Ryan describes another tactic of pretending to be interested in a platonic friendship only to surreptitiously guilt him into performing oral sex later as both typical of straight men and "bullshit" (line 17). Here, the association of this behavior with straight men along with the unambiguously negative expletive assessment makes Ryan's opinion on hypersexuality clear: it's not for him.

In this section, I have demonstrated that despite Lucas' unusual coming-out story, both black and white participants use language in similar ways to each other. All of the men are sensitive to aging and its implications for their physical attractiveness. Additionally, they enjoyed teasing me about my "old" age, even though I was only 29 at the time of our meetings.

They were familiar with and, when legal due to Robert's and Nathan's ages, frequented many of the same bars and nightclubs. They shared similar negative assessments about a single-minded focus on sexual activity, especially outside of long-term or emotionally-charged relationships. Finally, they all share common expectations of coupledom and marriage and admitted to the possibility of becoming parents.

In this, their knowledge of gay stereotypes and tropes, particularly as they relate to homonormativity, manifests in their language use. By sharing in humor based on a gay understanding of pop culture references and homonormative expectations for aging, they demonstrate their shared understandings of certain principles of homonormativity. In doing so, they not only identify themselves with homonormativity, but they also welcome the other participants into homonormativity. This process is reminiscent of the cyclic nature of performing gender—as participants exhibit their shared understandings of and identifications with homonormative characteristics, they reify these characteristics as desirable traits for being. As to the answer of what these demonstrations of homonormativity mean for the participants and what they can tell us about language use among both white and black gay men and their potential applications to other communities, I turn now to the conclusions section.

6.0   CONCLUSIONS

In the previous chapter, I describe the language used by the eight participants in this study as well as my own language to build community understanding with each other. I also argue that this community understanding is deeply affected by the homonormative scripts that are pervasive in contemporary American society that make gayness acceptable on a broad level. Indeed, American acceptance of gayness has increased to the highest levels over the past few decades. According to people in my parents' generation, for example, it is a new idea that two men might build a life together based on their mutual romantic and sexual interest in one another and that this life might be a part of their public personae, to say nothing about their legal personae. That my husband and I can speak openly about each other to our colleagues and not have strong fears of retaliation or discrimination, either on an institutional or individual basis, is testament to this fact. Further to this, that I even have a husband and our relationship has recently been recognized by the federal government, in addition to the numerous states within the country, is another piece of the growing acceptance of gay men.

However, this acceptance is specific to gay men, a term I use deliberately to describe men who are both homosexual and have a public identity as "gay." The kinds of gay men that enjoy societal support are the kinds that conform very closely to the regulations enforced by homonormativity. The kinds of gay men that appear in popular media representations, be they on television, in movies, or in news reports about private citizens, fit a very specific mold: they are

largely white, they are middle-class, they do not admit to sexual promiscuity, and many of them may be married or seeking to be married to long-time partners. The men who are celebrated as gay icons in American popular media—Dan Savage, Anderson Cooper, Neil Patrick Harris, Barney Frank—are white, affluent, and married or have histories of long-term, monogamous relationships.

The lack of positive images of homosexual men who deviate from homonormativity in some way, while not conclusive, lends strong evidence to the necessity of conformity as a prerequisite to success and societal acceptance. Men who deviate from heteronormative expectations by engaging in homosexual relationships must still conform to other basic expectations of acceptability. It is as if contemporary Americans have carved a space within heteronormativity for same-sex couples.

If the men in my study do not actually conform to homonormative expectations, they did not say so in our meetings. Of course, this may be due to a lack of long-time familiarity and friendship between me and the participants and each other. I can't know for sure whether these men expressed distaste for casual hook-ups at nightclubs or using Grindr and Scruff but actually deliberately engaged in these activities in their private lives. I can't know for certain whether their coming-out stories were actual representations of the coming-out event or whether they actually were out to their parents. I also don't know whether their shared laughter in the in-jokes reported here stems from the same understandings that I have explained.

But the important fact remains that they represented themselves as adhering to these scripts in our interactions, despite the veracity of their statements. My point has not been to argue that these men are homonormative in every action and interaction at all times, but that in these discussions, they have reproduced homonormative tropes and identified themselves with them.

By sharing their coming-out stories and then asking for reciprocation, they took part in a very salient part of homonormativity: having declared one's sexual identity to the most important people in one's life, as well as participating in and therefore contributing to the act of sharing coming-out stories. In explaining their interest in nightclubs, which have been and continue to be popular sites for finding sexual partners, as motivated by dancing or spending time with platonic friends, the participants and I affiliated ourselves with the kind of sexual behavior licensed by homonormativity: same-sex in orientation, but with the basic goal of securing a long-term partner. Similarly, they distance themselves from the ugly reputation of sexual promiscuity so closely connected to male same-sex sexuality by insisting on the "legitimacy" of their use. These explanations relieve potential suspicions about their use of mobile applications whose main purpose is to facilitate casual sexual encounters, and cast them as tech-savvy gay men who can beat the app designers at their own game by usurping the apps for monogamous purposes.

In concord with many trends in sociolinguistic research about gay ways of speaking as well as my anecdotal research, the participants in this study identified a "gay voice" or "gay accent," as we variously referred to it in our discussions, with femininity. At times the participants made direct comparisons to certain females' speech, such as cheerleaders, Barbie, or Valley Girls; at other times, they attributed characteristics to it that are not generally associated with stereotypical masculine speech, such as being precise, articulate, or high-pitched. Not everyone evoked the famous gay lisp of folk descriptions of gay speech, but when participants they did mention it, it was they were the ones to introduce it, even if they found it problematic. Some said that they rarely heard anyone lisp and others indicated that the lisp was a misnomer and that no gay sounding speakers they had heard actually lisped. However, references to such a

gay lisp co-occurred with the definite article "the," indicating not only their own familiarity with the singular phenomenon, but also their expectation that I would be familiar with it.

By negatively evaluating femininity and traits associated therewith (such as gay-sounding speech), they reiterated their commitments to normative, masculine behavior. None of the participants identified themselves as having an identifiable gay voice, and all of them recognized the (supposed for some) connection between gay voices and femininity. Even agreeing or admitting that my voice sounded gay was not easy for the participants, who apologized ("no offense"), hedged ("sort of"), or expressed uncertainty. Many of them immediately asked afterward whether I thought they had a gay voice, expressing doubt about their ability to judge their own voices or uncertainty about the ultimate answer to the question. None of the men who asked me about my opinion of their own voices exemplified the gay voice in my opinion, and sharing that with them resulted in visible expressions of relief.

Finally, by collaboratively building jokes and mocking each other in ways that are central to gay pop cultural icons or expectations, they exhibit their familiarity with these phenomena and accept others into a relaxed, convivial group based on this shared knowledge. Even in our joking about my advanced age nearing thirty and compared it to a more traditionally accepted middle-age (50s), they reproduced discourses that glorify youth for gay men with their hyperbolic imperatives to undergo medical cosmetic procedures and move to a warm, retirement community reflected the often criticized, yet normative obsession for youth and physical beauty within the gay community.

Despite my expectation that the black men among my participants would use markedly different linguistic features in the construction of their identities, this hypothesis was not supported. Of the four black men who participated in my dissertation project, one is a very

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extroverted member of the ball room community and the other three are closely affiliated with a large university in the area. This affiliation with the university brings them into close contact with white people, despite the presence of black people in the broader Pittsburgh community. Further, these three latter black participants are from middle class backgrounds, giving them more in common with the majority of my white participants, who were also of middle-class backgrounds.

Finally, and perhaps most crucially, my recruitment methods targeted only men who identified as gay and spent time in places that are closely affiliated with the white gay community—my own. These places, such as university clubs for gay and lesbian students, bars and clubs that cater mostly (but not exclusively) to white gay clientele, and my own personal networks, which are very predominantly white means that my recruitment methods did not extend outside of the bounds of homonormative gayness.

It should be no surprise, ultimately, then that the black gay men who participated in the study were those that saw the recruitment materials in these same, majority white environments. And because they come into contact with these spaces, it is also not surprising that they find themselves to be more closely affiliated with white gay men than black gay men, perhaps because of their present circumstances as university students or employees. That there is no grand difference in the ways that these black and white men mobilize language in creating their gay identities would naturally follow from these circumstances.

In summary, this dissertation has demonstrated that a group of eight gay men, half of them white and half of them black, make use of very similar linguistic resources in constructing their identities as gay men in talk with other gay men. Their reproduction of dominant homonormative discourses helped them build connections with each other in this artificial

setting. Were they to meet in some other context—perhaps at a mutual friend's casual party, at a bar or nightclub, or some other event—it is not inconceivable that referencing some of the aforementioned characteristics of homonormativity might have allowed them to build connections with each other in much the same way. Besides being participants in my study— which in hindsight I recognize now was set up by design, although not deliberate, to attract exclusively homonormative gay men—these men had their gay identities in common with one another. And their response to my recruitment methods indicates that they view their gay identities as definitive to them somehow.

Although I have described the men thus far as reproducing and affiliating themselves with homonormative discourses on masculinity, monogamy, a gay lifestyle, and the importance of coming-out, there are places where I view the men as having pushed back against homonormative discourses. Brown's 2012 critical article about scholarship on homonormativity questions the universalizing language used to describe homonormativity. Brown's problem "with Homonormativity (the theory) rests on the fact that over the last decade, as this analysis has gained popularity, homonormativity (and, even worse, the homonormative) has increasingly come to be represented in both academic and activist writings as a homogeneous, global external entity that exists outside all of us and exerts its terrifying, normative power on gay lives everywhere" (1066). He claims that much of the scholarship on homonormativity has as its site the very cities where homonormativity is generated and produced; research on homonormative discourses in New York City agree with research based in San Francisco, London, and other "global cities" as he calls them. Among other points, Brown calls for research to focus on the lives of people living outside homonormativity and outside these global cities. This will help to combat the presentation of "homonormativity as all-encompassing and unassailable" (2012,

1067). Brown suggests that neoliberal policies, closely connected to homonormativity, are unevenly distributed and the impacts of these policies, again with homonormativity, are sensitive to the local aspects of gay lived lives, both in large cities and in suburbs or rural areas.

While he does not provide a definition of global cities or the "metropolitan centers" where much work is centered, I take Pittsburgh to not constitute one of the aforementioned sites. With a total population of 305,704 for the city itself (2010 Census) and 2.7 million for the metropolitan area (2012 Census estimates), Pittsburgh is the 20th largest metropolitan area in the United States. Having lived in Pittsburgh, I felt that it had some elements of a large city such as a robust fine arts community and well-respected performing arts groups as well as its famous sports teams. On the other hand, the city always felt to be manageable in size and definitely imparted a "small world" feeling in its neighborhoods. Perhaps then, in light of Brown's call to move research on homonormativity outside global cities, we can consider the present dissertation to be a step in that direction, even if Pittsburgh is not a small or uninfluential city.

I have demonstrated that homonormativity has a strong impact on the men in this study, however I can identify a few moments where the men pushed against its boundaries. In the first group meeting, Nunu talked about his gender presentation with Richard, Nathan, and me. Richard commented that it must take a lot of confidence for Nunu to live his life. In reference to Nunu's feminine presentation and commitment to feminizing his body, Richard said he was "to be commended." This could be interpreted as a patronizing comment, but my impression was that Richard genuinely meant to compliment Nunu. And while Richard's own gender presentation is decidedly masculine, his positively appraising Nunu's gender presentation is a break with discourses that demand males born males act and look masculine.

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In some ways Nunu is somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, I might use the label "genderqueer" or "trans" to describe his presentation, even though he doesn't use these words himself. He responds to and uses male pronouns in self-reference, but engages in typically feminine aesthetic practices such as wearing long, artificial finger nails, wearing long-haired wigs, carrying a purse, and wearing high heels. Despite this Nunu refers to himself as a "gay guy;" when discussing the ability of straight and gay men to appraise the physical attractiveness of other men, Nunu said "we don't have a problem," clearly including himself in the term "gay guys."

On the other hand, Nunu's attitudes toward gender and relationships are very normative. During a discussion about bisexuality, Nunu agreed strongly with Richard and Nathan's assertion that true bisexuality was not real; either a person preferred men or a person preferred women. On another discussion about whether the group members believe that homosexuality is a trait one is born with, Nunu asserted that it was. "In order for you- it even to cross your mind, you know, you have to be [homosexual…] because like a straight, like manly man, he's not going to think about, you know, messing with another male. It's just not going to cross his mind…" His assumption here is that straight men find the idea of same-sex sex so outside the bounds of possibility that unless a man has some inborn natural tendency to be attracted to other men, they would never discover their male-male sexuality. Nunu's ideas about gender normativity reinforce the idea that masculine people prefer feminine partners. In reference to his own femininity, Nunu claimed "I don't get why masculine guys like masculine guys." He attributed certain musical preferences to feminine guys (Britney Spears, boy bands, Christina Aguilera, Lady Gaga). Masculine guys, "in [his] case" Nunu clarified, like rap music and they sit low and back in their car seats.

These two examples are centered on Nunu, the least homonormative of the eight participants. However, what they illustrate is that homonormativity does not exert a completely totalizing influence on these men's lives. The examples where participants admit to specific and deliberate uses of gay-sounding speech are another instance of activity that is not explicitly homonormative. This is to not deny the power of homonormative discourses. There was much effort on the participants' parts to distance themselves from femininity and hypersexuality; they spoke disparagingly of men whose singular focus was casual sex, they justified their usage of Grindr and Scruff by emphasizing the friendships and long-term relationships that have resulted from them, and they expressed concern over whether their speech might be perceived as gay. But we can also find moments where the metaphorical curtain has been lifted or drawn back to shed light on "ordinary" lives lived (as Brown calls them).

These findings are not meant to be generalizable in the claims made about the specific language these men use or the specific referents of their talk, but rather they open a window into the subtle ways that speakers make use of language that is specific to the context of time, place, and content. Like discussions of language use among other minorities, such as women or other studies of gay men's language use, the linguistic resources under examination here should not be understood to be unique to the group under investigation. Instead, the focus of the research is the ways that these men mobilize existing resources to create identities within the context at hand, and the sensitivity of these men to the context in their interpretation of the talk. This highlights the flexible, contextual, and ephemeral nature of language even in its very specific uses within a research project, a group conversation, a narrative, or a single utterance.

6.1   IMPLICATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There are of course several limitations to this study, perhaps the most important of which is the study design, which I now recognize in hindsight to have been one that could have only attracted homonormative participants and encouraged such homonormative language use. From my recruitment methods, which assumed an identity and then made expectations about what sites such a person might visit, to the questions I asked in the individual interviews and the way the conversations were direct, the underlying assumption was that the participants were homonormative and their speech would reflect this. In writing this dissertation, I have come to discover my own homonormativity and I have also come to realize the impact of my own expectations and adherence to cultural ideologies on the research that I perform.

From the beginning, using the word "gay" in the recruitment materials and in talking about the research project to potential participants or potential leads for participants, I already began to narrow the scope of my research. This narrowing, alas, cannot practically be avoided; a research study must define its subjects and limit inclusion to a certain set of criteria. And the criteria for inclusion likely excluded men who did not operate within homonormativity's boundaries, simple because they would not have seen the recruitment materials or they would not have believed themselves to be eligible for participation.

How to address this issue is not clear. Perhaps using broader terminology would increase the potential for non-homonormative people to participate. One term that immediately presents itself is *queer*, although its interpretation can rarely be ascertained without careful and deliberate indication. Wording a recruitment flyer with an eye to avoiding assumptions of homonormativity is frustratingly complex, for the moment the word "man" appears, one has already assumed gender and sex identity and begun to reinforce these key binaries that undergird hetero- and

homo-normativity. Still, replacing or adding the word *queer* or using one of many acrostics available, like *LGBTQ*, might invite people who don't view themselves as members of the gay community.

A further problem is sampling, a perennial problem in many studies. Future research might be able to avoid the relatively homogeneous set of participants that I recruited by expanding the recruitment efforts outside of the researcher's own personal circles and outside organizations set up to serve the same set of community members. More detailed discussion with all of the participants, as well as more detailed recording of the participants' speech would result in further data for discourse analysis as well as phonetic analysis, to bolster existing research on the phonetic realization of speech produced by gay speakers.

The call then is for further research on all fronts, to incorporate more speakers of every community. Speaking specifically to this study, future work will expand on Nunu's particular set of language use and to investigate more fully the ways that his local ballroom community interacts with the national ballroom scene, and what effect these local and national community interactions have on language use and production.

Additional research should attempt to recruit men from outside the general, predominantly white gay community in Pittsburgh (or in any area). Since the men were recruited via personal networks and via existing organizations set up to serve this community, it stands to reason that the men who agreed to participate were affiliated with this general gay community. Recruitment from outside that group might yield a larger available population of non-white gay men, as well as reveal gay men of all races whose language use and relationship to stereotypes may differ dramatically from those in the present study.

This dissertation has discussed the myriad linguistic resources that a group of gay men in Pittsburgh make use of in creating their gay identities and relating to each other. In addition, it has examined how these identities are created in the context of the conversation at hand and take advantage of certain elements of gayness that are appropriate or desired for that individual. At the same time, elements of gayness that are not desirable, such as femininity or promiscuity, are either absent from their speech or are kept at a distance. This distancing is done either explicitly by describing one's self as different from that characteristic, or implicitly by taking stances in opposition or lack of alignment to that characteristic or the people who exemplify it.

Although I do not claim that this dissertation's findings are generalizable to other speakers, be they gay or Pittsburghers or both, there is broader applicability of the results to other contexts. First, the uptake of particular facets of gayness while at the same time refusing other identity characteristics lends further evidence to the practice of considering identity to be fluid, dynamic, and context-specific. Although I have spoken only about gay identity in this project, the conclusions raise questions about other identities that might be considered to be more fixed, such as sex or race. As these identities are largely social ones, we gain an understanding that individuals can affiliate themselves varyingly with certain elements that concatenate to produce identities like male or white, and that the particular characteristics that individuals might affiliate with are not static. Depending on the context, it might be more salient to foreground the nurturing aspects of womanhood at one time and downplay this characteristic in favor of an emotional portrayal of womanhood at another. I therefore problematize the expectation that a person's social identity will have an influence on his or her speech at any given moment.

With this destabilization in mind, it then provides a possible answer to the aforementioned difficulty that researchers on language and sexuality have encountered in

identifying a set of phonetic characteristics shared by gay or lesbian speakers. It may be that there is indeed a set of such gay allophones, but it may not arise in laboratory conditions because at the time of recording, the subject's gay identity is relatively unimportant. This may be why some studies find vowel space to be significantly different among gay speakers while others assert it is instead stop-consonant aspiration.

Of course there remains the reality that many speakers of English, for example, claim to be able to identify a gay-sounding signal and that many speakers will often agree on what is and is not a gay-sounding signal. To this, my research adds support for the existence of ephemeral cultural models of what gay-sounding speech is, even if no one single individual produces it in his natural speech. While we might dismiss stereotypes as inaccurate or hyperbolic representations of exceptional exemplars, their effect on the average speaker's understanding of what it means to sound gay or black or female or educated is nonetheless discernible. Stereotypes form an important part of lay and even academic discussions about linguistic phenomena. The general trend toward authenticity in speech, particularly within variationist sociolinguistics, may have clouded the situation as it relates to identity shift. Carmen Fought's 2008 plenary address at the 37th NWAV conference called for linguists to move beyond the idealized native speaker of a dialect and to examine the border cases of language use. I understand the participants in my study to be border cases as well, not because they straddle two languages or even two social categories (although perhaps they do this too), but because their sometimes highly salient gay identities are highly contested, both personally and individually as well as nationally and en masse. That their language reflects this ambiguity is an example of the need for linguists to consider varying language use as part of the varying identities themselves.

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TRANSCRIPT CONVENTIONS

[…]	indicates overlapping speech; left bracket indicates beginning of speaker A's overlap with speaker B; right bracket indicates end of speaker B's overlap with speaker A
[0.4]	indicates length of pause in seconds
(…)	indicates transcriber comments, such as voice quality, laughter, marked intonation
?	indicates previous utterance produced with rising intonation
necessar-	indicates an unfinished but identifiable word
:	indicates preceding segment lengthened; more colons indicate longer lengthening
uh-hm	affirmative feedback; "I'm listening," "I understand"
uh-uh	negative feedback; "No," "I don't agree"
uh-huh	affirmative, surprised feedback "Really?"
hunh	neutral, amused feedback; "I'm thinking about what you said"
hm	neutral feedback; "I'm pondering what you said."

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS OF MEETINGS

The following are the lists of questions and topics that I used to guide the individual sociolinguistic interviews as well as the two group sessions.

B.1   QUESTIONS AND TOPICS OF INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS

A.   Upbringing
  a. Tell me about your childhood.
  b. Where did you grow up?
  c. What was your family life like?
B.   Coming-out process
  a. Are you out? To whom?
  b. When did you come-out?
  c. How did you come-out?
  d. Whom did you come-out to? How did that go? How did it affect your relationships with these people?
C.   Primary social networks
  a. Whom do you consider to be your best friends?
  b. What activities do you do together? Where do you go?
  c. Do you spend a lot of time in one place (such as work, school, a club, etc.)? What is it about a place that makes you want to spend time there?
  d. Do you date? What do you look for in a potential partner?
  e. Do you think you'll ever get married or form a long-term partnership?
D.   Family relationships
  a. Tell me about your family.

    b. Whom are you closest to in your family? Why?

    c. What does your family think about your sexuality?

E.   Social activities

    a. What do you do for fun? Where do you go to do it? Why do you go there?

    b. Are you a member of any clubs, groups, or organizations? Why or why not? What do you gain from membership in said organization?

    c. Do you consider yourself a part of the "LGBT community"? Why or why not? What does membership entail? Who is a member?

B.2   QUESTIONS AND TOPICS OF GROUP MEETINGS

A. Entertainment

    a. What kind of music do you listen to? Why do you listen to this music? Do the actions, activism, politics, etc. of an artist influence you to listen (or not to listen) to his or her music?

    b. What kind of movies and TV do you watch? Why? Are you influenced by the topics covered in the movies/shows? What about the actors?

    c. What do you read? Do you read or participate in any on-line communities, blogs, etc.? What websites do you frequent?

B. Society and politics

    a. Do you consider yourselves political? Politically active? What are politics important or unimportant for you? What kind of activism do you engage in (if any)?

    b. What is the Pittsburgh gay scene like? Where is it centered? What are its famous spots and some famous individuals? Do you participate? Do you feel that you are closely intertwined in the community or do you feel like an outsider? Why do you participate/not participate?

    c. Are there any political situations that you find particularly moving? Are there any hot-button issues that you don't find important?

    d. Have you ever boycotted a company or product? Why?

    e. Have you ever participated in a gay pride event (march, rally, party, etc.)?

    f. Where do you think the US will be in ten years, speaking of its LGBT residents?

C. Identity

    a. Do you feel that being gay is a large part of your identity? How? Why?

    b. What effects has being gay had on your life? Your family and friends? Education and career?

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

The following text comprised the fliers that were distributed to local university gay and lesbian

centers, local non-profit organizations serving gay populations, and local private establishments

with gay clientele. Some sites displayed the fliers on their bulletin boards, while others included

them in their digital e-mails and newsletters.

Participants needed for a University of Pittsburgh social sciences research study about language used by gay men in the Pittsburgh metropolitan area. You will be paid $10/hour for your participation in taking part in a video- and audio-recorded interview and a focus group. Participation should take no longer than an hour at a time over two or three visits.

Eligibility requirements: you must be…
- between the ages of 18-28,
- a gay man,
- a native speaker of American English, and
- either white, Hispanic, African American or East Asian in ethnic origin.

If you want to participate, send an e-mail to: gaylanguageproject@gmail.com

CONSENT FORM

Below is a copy of the text of the consent form that the participants read, discussed, signed, and kept an anonymous copy of. The dissertation's methodology and consent protocol were approved by the University of Pittsburgh's Institutional Review Board (IRB) on July 22, 2011 and renewed on July 22, 2012 under IRB number: PRO11050407.

CONSENT TO ACT AS A PARTICIPANT IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE: Intersection of Language, Sexuality and Ethnicity

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:	Kristopher Geda PhD student Department of Linguistics University of Pittsburgh 2816 Cathedral of Learning Pittsburgh, PA 15260 Telephone: 810.964.4825
MENTOR:	Scott F. Kiesling, PhD Associate Professor Department of Linguistics University of Pittsburgh 2801 Cathedral of Learning Pittsburgh, PA 15260 Telephone: 412.624.5916

Why is this research being done?

This research project will attempt to better describe aspects of speech in a portion of the gay community. Previous studies on language used by gay men have focused on only white men; I aim to include some gay men who also belong to ethnic minority communities in the descriptive work to see how language is used in ways that may be the same or different. On the one hand, it will allow me to look at behaviors that may or may not be associated with the gay community. On the other hand, I will be able to analyze some of the social factors that affect a person's use of language that are of interest to linguists.

Who is being asked to take part in this research study?

You are being invited to take part in this research study because you have responded to either a flier or a message of some kind. People invited to participate in this study must be between 18 and 28 years of age, male-identified, gay-identified, native speakers of English, and either white, Hispanic, African American or Asian in ethnic origin. At maximum, 15 people will be asked to participate.

What procedures will be performed for research purposes?
In this research study, I will video record (including audio) all of our interactions. Our first meeting will be a standard interview procedure in which we talk and get to know each other and you can answer some questions about yourself and your hobbies, your social network, etc. Additionally, I will ask you some questions about how being gay impacts your experiences with others.

Other meetings will consist of focus groups: groups of three or four participants who will interact together. Focus groups will take place in a room and will basically consist of structured conversations among the participants. You will be asked to participate in at least one focus group, but you may (at your choice) participate in more than one. During the focus groups, you may further discuss your sexuality and how it affects or doesn't affect your personal, social and political activities and experiences.

If you decide to take part in this research study, your interactions with me and with other participants will be video and audio recorded.

What are the possible risks, side effects, and discomforts of this research study?

The possible risks, side effects or discomforts of this study are anticipated to be minor. Nevertheless, you may experience embarrassment or some discomfort in regards to the questions or topics of the interview or focus groups. You may perhaps also experience social friction with other participants. Remember that you will always have the option to not answer a question or not participate in a particular discussion if you are uncomfortable; you also always the option to discontinue your participation (see withdrawal below).

There is always the risk of a breach of confidentiality. After the recordings are made, you will only be referred to by pseudonym. The key to your actual identity and pseudonym will be kept separate from the research data and consent forms. These files will be kept under lock and key when physical, and when electronic, under strong passwords. Access will only be granted to my mentor and me.

What are possible benefits from taking part in this study?

You will likely receive no direct benefit from taking part in this research study.

Will I be paid if I take part in this research study?

You will be paid $10 per hour for the time you participate in this study. Partial hours will be paid to the quarter hour ($2.50 per 15 minutes), rounded up at the seventh minute. For example, if your interview and focus group participation time totals one hour and forty three minutes, you will be paid $17.50.

You will be paid for your participation, even if you do not complete all of the activities (interview and focus group). If you withdraw early, you will be paid for the time you spent active in the research project up until your withdrawal. You will receive payment at the end of the interview and any focus group(s) you participate in.

Who will know about my participation in this research study?

Besides my mentor and me, no one else will know about your participation. Any information about you obtained from this research will be kept as confidential (private) as possible. All records related to your involvement in this research study will be stored in a locked file cabinet; digital files (such as video and audio files) will be stored in password-protected folders on a password-protected computer. Your identity on these records will be indicated by a pseudonym rather than by your name, and the information linking these pseudonyms with your identity will be kept separate from the research records. You will not be identified by your real name in any publication of the research; all references to you will be made with the pseudonym. Additionally, any audio- or video-samples I use in publication or academic presentation will be edited to remove identifying information such as names or nicknames and faces will be blurred beyond recognition.

Who will have access to identifiable information related to my participation in this research study?

In addition to the investigator listed on the first page of this authorization (consent) form, the following individuals will or may have access to identifiable information related to your participation in this research study:

Authorized representatives of the University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office may review your identifiable research information for the purpose of monitoring the appropriate conduct of this research study.

In unusual cases, the investigators may be required to release identifiable information related to your participation in this research study in response to an order from a court of law. If the investigator learns that you or someone with whom you are involved is in serious danger or potential harm, he will need to inform, as required by Pennsylvania law, the appropriate agencies.

For how long will the investigators be permitted to use and disclose identifiable information related to my participation in this research study?

The investigator may continue to use and disclose, for the purposes described above, identifiable information related to your participation in this research study for an indefinite period of time.

Is my participation in this research study voluntary?

Your participation in this research study, to include the use and disclosure of your identifiable information for the purposes described above, is completely voluntary. Whether or not you provide your consent for participation in this research study will have no effect on your current or future relationship with the University of Pittsburgh.

May I withdraw, at a future date, my consent for participation in this research study?

You may withdraw, at any time, your consent for participation in this research study, to include the use and disclosure of your identifiable information for the purposes described above. Any identifiable research information recorded for, or resulting from, your participation in this research study prior to the date that you formally withdrew your consent may continue to be used and disclosed by the investigators for the purposes described above.

To formally withdraw your consent for participation in this research study you should provide a written and dated notice of this decision to the principal investigator of this research study at the address listed on the first page of this form.

Your decision to withdraw your consent for participation in this research study will have no effect on your current or future relationship with the University of Pittsburgh.

****
VOLUNTARY CONSENT

The above information has been explained to me and all of my current questions have been answered. I understand that I am encouraged to ask questions about any aspect of this research study during the course of this study, and that such future questions will be answered by a qualified individual or by the investigator listed on the first page of this consent document at the telephone number given. I understand that I may always request that my questions, concerns or complaints be addressed by a listed investigator.

I understand that I may contact the Human Subjects Protection Advocate of the IRB Office, University of Pittsburgh (1-866-212-2668) to discuss problems, concerns, and questions; obtain information; offer input; or discuss situations that have occurred during my participation.

By signing this form, I agree to participate in this research study. A copy of this consent form will be given to me.

_____   _____   _____
Participant's Signature   Printed Name of Participant   Date

CERTIFICATION of INFORMED CONSENT

I certify that I have explained the nature and purpose of this research study to the above-named individual, and I have discussed the potential benefits and possible risks of study participation. Any questions the individual has about this study have been answered, and I will always be available to address future questions as they arise."

_____   _____
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent   Role in Research Study

_____   _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

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