

Gender & Society

<http://gas.sagepub.com/>

A Very "Gay" Straight?: Hybrid Masculinities, Sexual Aesthetics, and the Changing Relationship between Masculinity and Homophobia

Tristan Bridges

Gender & Society 2014 28: 58 originally published online 26 September 2013

DOI: 10.1177/0891243213503901

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://gas.sagepub.com/content/28/1/58>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



Sociologists for Women in Society

Additional services and information for *Gender & Society* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://gas.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://gas.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Jan 16, 2014

[OnlineFirst Version of Record](#) - Sep 26, 2013

[What is This?](#)

A VERY “GAY” STRAIGHT?

Hybrid Masculinities, Sexual Aesthetics, and the Changing Relationship between Masculinity and Homophobia

TRISTAN BRIDGES

The College at Brockport, State University of New York, USA

This article addresses a paradoxical stance taken by young straight men in three groups who identify aspects of themselves as “gay” to construct heterosexual masculine identities. By subjectively recognizing aspects of their identities as “gay,” these men discursively distance themselves from stereotypes of masculinity and privilege and/or frame themselves as politically progressive. Yet, both of these practices obscure the ways they benefit from and participate in gender and sexual inequality. I develop a theory of “sexual aesthetics” to account for their behavior and its consequences, contributing to a growing body of theory regarding the hybridization of contemporary masculinities and complicating theories of sexual practice.

Keywords: *hybridity; hybrid masculinities; sexual aesthetics; gay aesthetics; hegemonic masculinity*

There has been little attention paid to the queer practices of people who identify as heterosexual, and further research in this area is needed (Schippers 2000, 760).

AUTHOR’S NOTE: Thanks to Tara Tober and CJ Pascoe for critical feedback and ongoing support, and Rae Blumberg, Michael Kimmel, Greta Snyder, Elizabeth Gorman, Rachel Rinaldo, Jane Ward, Dana Britton, Neal King, Jennifer Silva, Lawrie Balfour, Benjamin Snyder, Matthew Morrison, Matthew Hughey, Portia Levasseur, and John Bridges. Thanks also to Joya Misra and Mary Bernstein for editorial guidance, and anonymous reviewers at Gender & Society. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Tristan Bridges, The College at Brockport, SUNY, 350 New Campus Drive, Brockport, NY 14420, USA; e-mail: TBridges@Brockport.edu.

GENDER & SOCIETY, Vol. 28 No. 1, February 2014 58-82

DOI: 10.1177/0891243213503901

© 2013 by The Author(s)

This article explores the gender and sexual dynamics of three groups of men—with varying commitments to feminist ideals (from anti- to pro-) and levels of interest in gender and sexual inequality (from highly concerned to apathetic)—to investigate heterosexual men's relationships with gender, sexuality, and inequality, and the potential for change embedded within a peculiar practice. Heterosexual men in each group defined aspects of themselves as "gay." But they did so in a way that allowed them to retain a "masculine" distance from homosexuality. The practice initially appears to be the mirror image of Connell's (1992) research on gay men classifying themselves as "a very straight gay." Rather than gay men co-opting elements of "straight" culture and style, I discuss straight men borrowing elements of "gay" culture and discursively framing themselves as "gay." Compared with Connell's (1992) "straight gay" men, however, the men in this study engage in this practice for different reasons and with distinct consequences. They rely on "gay aesthetics" to construct *hybrid masculinities* (Demetriou 2001; Messner 1993) that work to distance them in subtly different ways from stigmatizing stereotypes of masculinity.

While scholarship discusses homophobia as a fundamental element of contemporary masculine identities (Connell 1992; Herek 1986; Kimmel 1994; Lehne 1976; Pascoe 2007), the practices of the men I studied—straight men who identify with some "gay" cultural styles—appear to challenge this relationship. I theorize "sexual aesthetics" to make sense of this apparent contradiction. "Sexual aesthetics" refer to cultural and stylistic distinctions used to delineate boundaries between gay and straight cultures and individuals. The ways in which heterosexual men in each group deploy gay aesthetics reveal group-specific meanings and consequences. Broadly speaking, straight men's reliance on aspects of gay culture illustrates some of the ways that sexual prejudice, inequality, and the relationship between masculinity and homophobia are better understood as transforming than disappearing. Similar to other analyses of contemporary hybrid masculine practices, these men's behavior conceals privileges associated with white, heterosexual masculinity.

This article addresses three issues: (1) the hybridization of straight men's identities through the use of gay aesthetics; (2) the social construction of sexual aesthetics; and (3) the motivations for and consequences of this practice.

HYBRID MASCULINITIES

Hybrid masculinities refer to gender projects that incorporate "bits and pieces" (Demetriou 2001) of marginalized and subordinated masculinities

and, at times, femininities. “Hybrid” is used in the social sciences and humanities to address processes and practices of cultural integration or mixing (Burke 2009). Hybridity is a useful framework to address scholarship on contemporary transformations in masculine practices, performances, and politics (e.g., Anderson 2009; Arxer 2011; Barber 2008; Bridges 2010; Demetriou 2001; Heath 2003; Messerschmidt 2010; Messner 1993, 2007; Pascoe 2007; Schippers 2000; Ward 2008; Wilkins 2009). The fact that masculinities are changing is nothing new, but the incorporation of elements coded as “feminine” (Messerschmidt 2010; Messner 1993), “gay” (Bridges 2010; Demetriou 2001), or “Black” (Hughey 2012; Ward 2008) into white, heterosexual masculine identities and performances may be. Messner’s (1993) analysis of high-profile men crying in public or new norms surrounding involvement among fathers is one example.

A central issue in research on hybrid masculinities is whether they challenge and/or perpetuate systems of inequality. There are three streams of research that address this question: One questions the extent of hybridization (e.g., Connell and Messerschmidt 2005); a second considers hybridization as pervasive and as illustrating a unilateral move toward greater gender and sexual equality (e.g., Anderson 2009; McCormack 2012); and a third—agreeing that hybridization is significant—argues that it perpetuates inequalities in new and “softer” ways (e.g., Demetriou 2001; Messner 1993).

Connell and Messerschmidt, briefly addressing hybrid masculinities, acknowledge that “specific masculine practices may be appropriated into other masculinities” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 845). Yet, they are not convinced that hybrid masculine forms represent anything beyond local subcultural variation. Others have been less dismissive. For example, Anderson’s (2009) theory of “inclusive masculinity” argues that contemporary transformations in men’s behaviors and beliefs are pervasive and undermine gender and sexual hierarchies and inequality. While many stress an intimate connection between masculinity and homophobia (Kimmel 1994; Pascoe 2007), Anderson proposes that this connection exists only in social contexts with high levels of “homohysteria,”¹ a condition that, he argues, does not characterize contemporary Western societies (see also McCormack 2012). Anderson frames contemporary masculinities as characterized by increasing levels of “inclusivity” and equality.

The bulk of the literature agrees with Anderson that hybrid masculinities are widespread, but departs from him when analyzing their meanings and consequences. As Messner argues, hybrid masculinities

represent highly significant (but exaggerated) shifts in the cultural and personal styles . . . but these changes do not necessarily contribute to the undermining of conventional structures of men's power. Although "softer" and more "sensitive" styles of masculinity are developing among some privileged groups of men, this does not necessarily contribute to the emancipation of women; in fact, quite the contrary may be true. (Messner 1993, 725)

More recently, Messner (2007) theorized a culturally ascendant hybrid masculinity combining "toughness" with "tenderness" in ways that work to obscure power and inequality. Similarly, Demetriou (2001) addresses the appropriation of elements of subordinated and marginalized "Others" by white heterosexual men that ultimately work to recuperate white, heterosexual, masculine privilege. Focusing on the incorporation of gay male culture, Demetriou illustrates how hybrid masculinities can be understood as contemporary expressions of existing forms of inequality. "New, hybrid configurations of gender practice . . . enable [heterosexual men] to reproduce their dominance . . . in historically novel ways" (Demetriou 2001, 351). Like Messner, Demetriou theorizes hybrid masculinities as blurring gender differences and boundaries, but presenting no real challenges to inequality.

Similar findings have been documented in formal movements (Heath 2003), new methods of navigating "masculine" norms surrounding sexuality (Arxer 2011; Pascoe 2007; Schippers 2000; Ward 2008; Wilkins 2009), men's adoption of "feminine" concerns with appearance (Barber 2008), and throughout popular culture (Pfeil 1995; Savran 1998). Consistent with Messner (1993, 2007) and Demetriou (2001), this scholarship suggests that inequality is transforming. That these changes have primarily emerged among groups of young, heterosexual, white men speaks to the flexibility of identity afforded privileged groups.

SEXUAL AESTHETICS

The literature on hybrid masculinities focuses on the assimilation of aspects of cultures and performances associated with various marginalized and subordinated "Others." A significant strand in this research deals with the incorporation of "gay" cultural styles to enact masculine gender identities (e.g., Anderson 2009; Bridges 2010; Demetriou 2001; McCormack 2012; Pascoe 2007; Wilkins 2009). Theorizing the "aesthetic" elements of sexualities enables a more thorough analysis of the consequences of their incorporation into hybrid masculine identities and practices.

Scholars understand gender and sexuality as co-constructed (e.g., Pascoe 2007; Schippers 2000; Seidman 1996; Stein and Plummer 1994; Ward 2008) and unstable (Butler 1990; Seidman 1996), prompting research into the cultural work that maintains identity categories. Connell's (1992) work on gay men who identify as "a very straight gay" is a useful illustration. Connell found that gay men's use of "straight" had less to do with cultural subversion and more to do with safety and gender identification. Gay men who incorporate elements of "straight" masculinity are a powerful illustration of the co-construction of gender and sexuality (e.g., Hennen 2005; Ocampo 2012; Ward 2008). Other research focuses on how "gay culture" is not only gendered but racialized (e.g., Ocampo 2012; Ward 2008) and classed (e.g., Halperin 2012; Valocchi 1999).

Ward's research on "dude sex"—white, heterosexual-identified men seeking sex with other heterosexual-identified men—highlights the aesthetic elements of sexuality as gendered and racialized as well. Ward theorizes "queer and straight as cultural spheres that people choose to inhabit in large part because they experience a cultural and political fit" (Ward 2008, 431). Similar to Connell's participants, the men in Ward's (2008) study rely on what I call "straight aesthetics" to craft identities as straight men. Sexual aesthetics play a central role in claims to cultural affiliations with both gay and straight culture, but affiliations with sexual cultures also involve more than simply claiming ownership of the "appropriate" aesthetics.

Sexualities are communicated and adopted to define one's self and others based on a wide array of sexual aesthetics. Sexual aesthetics refer to cultural and stylistic distinctions utilized to delineate symbolic boundaries between gay and straight cultures and individuals. The term has been used before in ways not wholly inconsistent with my use. Gates (1988) employs the term to discuss late 19th-century music criticism whereby critics felt they could identify qualitative distinctions between men's and women's compositions. Anders (1999) uses the term in a similar way with reference to sexuality, highlighting "gay" literary styles. Attwood employs the term to discuss the framing of pornography as a "marker of distinction, sophistication and taste" (Attwood 2007, 448). Similar to my conceptualization of sexual aesthetics, Halperin discusses "gay aesthetics" to refer to "gay culture" as distinct from "collections of gay individuals" (Halperin 2012, 129).

A variety of things can "count" as sexual aesthetics: interests, material objects, styles of bodily comportment, language, opinions, clothing, and behaviors. Theorizing sexual aesthetics enables an analysis of sexuality as both a *sexual* and *cultural* category (e.g., Halperin 2012; Ward 2008).

Connell's (1992) and Ward's (2008) research considers why men engaging in same-sex behavior might rely on what I am calling straight aesthetics, but—as Schippers (2000) notes—less research considers straight-identified men who rely on gay aesthetics.

Like hybrid masculinities, there is a dual potential embedded within sexual aesthetics to challenge and/or reproduce inequality. Whether this potential is realized is an empirical question. While capable of being used to subvert gender and sexual boundaries and inequality, this shift can also work to obscure inequality in new ways by relying on an aesthetic discourse that (implicitly) disregards its existence.

DATA AND METHODS

I selected groups of men for this study based on two axes of variation: their gender-political affiliations and the level of reflexivity with which they consider gender-political concerns. The three groups vary on both axes²: fathers' rights activists, pro-feminist men, and a group without formal gender-political affiliation—bar regulars. The majority of the men in my sample are white (56 of 63) and all but two identify as heterosexual (61 of 63). Thus, my sample is consistent with other research that discusses the flexibility afforded contemporary straight, white masculinities (e.g., Anderson 2009; Messner 1993; Pascoe 2007; Ward 2008; Wilkins 2009).

The behavioral pattern I discuss—heterosexual men's reliance upon gay aesthetics—was not present among every member of every group. Seventeen out of the 63 men in the study explicitly engaged in this practice. The practice did, however, appear among all three groups. It is not my intention to claim that my findings are statistically representative. Rather, this article is concerned with theorizing a term that helps examine the motivations behind and consequences of an interesting pattern of behavior (Small 2009).

I conducted an ethnographic study of these three groups of men in central Virginia over the course of two years as part of a larger project on men's gender-political identities and activism. I assigned pseudonyms to participants and groups for anonymity. All three groups saw me as an outside observer. I made initial contact with an organizer from the fathers' rights group through their website to inquire about studying the group. I met the men in the pro-feminist group through a connection with a university from which three members were graduated. The bar regulars I sought were a group of young men with similar demographic characteristics to

the other two groups I studied. I was interested in comparing a group of men who met frequently because of overlapping social interests but unrelated to a specific job or organization. Following is a brief overview of each group.

Men Can Parent Too is a fathers' rights activist organization attempting to raise awareness about and protest what they perceive as gender inequality in divorce and custody proceedings. Ask any member if gender inequality exists and he will give you an answer similar to Dave, a 35-year-old lawyer who volunteers his time providing information and support to divorcing fathers: "Men and women are not equal. It's really as simple as that. Women get more than men. They get more from men in their marriages just like they get more when those marriages break up. Inequality exists. Men are getting screwed."

Guys for Gender Justice is a pro-feminist group of men who meet regularly to discuss gender and sexual inequality, raise money for non-profit organizations dealing with violence against women, and volunteer for feminist organizations and causes. Ask a member about the existence of gender inequality, and he will likely tell you something akin to Dan, a 25-year-old graphic designer: "Women have been getting the shaft for millennia. . . . Men don't get how they are actually a part of it. Women and men are unequal and we all have a part to play to fix it."

The Border Boys are a group of bar regulars at a small, privately owned restaurant and bar. Their weekly meetings are less structured than the other two groups, though no less frequent. They are also less reflexive about gender and inequality, but gender, sexuality, and inequality are popular topics of conversation. Ask one of The Border Boys whether gender inequality exists and he might give you an answer like Jeffrey's, a 29-year-old restaurant employee still uncertain of his life ambitions: "I don't know. . . . Actually, let me qualify that: I don't care. If men and women are unequal, they are, and if not, they're not. Everybody has to deal with the shit they are dealt."

Each of the groups kept regular meeting times. I observed participants both in and out of their meeting settings. I informally interviewed men throughout the study, but formal, in-depth, semistructured interviews were conducted at the conclusion of my study as well. Interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes. As a young, white man, my own identity was consistent with most of the men I studied. These factors certainly played a role in the data I was able to collect and the interactions I observed. It may, for instance, have contributed to me being less noticed than I might have been otherwise. It might have also produced a level of comfort due to potentially

assumed similarities in our values and beliefs. Conversely, respondents may not have explained some things to me out of a belief that I "must know." So, I could have also missed out on aspects of their lives because both they and I neglected them as significant. Interview questions dealt with friendships, romantic relationships, work lives, family, and beliefs about more abstract issues like power and inequality, and whether and how they saw these issues at work in their own lives.

Field notes and interviews were transcribed and coded according to a grounded theoretical method, allowing findings to emerge from the data (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Open coding revealed the framing of behavior, opinions, speech, dress, and tastes as "gay" among all three groups. I initially relied on gay aesthetics as a sensitizing concept (Blumer 1954), providing a framework to consider the practice.

A VERY "GAY" STRAIGHT?

Dan is a member of Guys for Gender Justice, a group he says meets for two purposes:

We . . . talk about how guys are a part of inequality and how we can change that. . . . We try to, like, volunteer our time and stuff to other groups . . . you know, that are for gender equality. . . . So, basically, we say we're feminist in two ways: how we think and how we act.

I asked whether the majority of the members of his organization identified as heterosexual. "They're straight . . . they're all straight," Dan told me. Jokingly, he continued, "And it's funny, 'cause we're all involved in this totally *gay* thing, but we're all straight . . . you know?" When I asked whether Dan also identified as straight, his response was interesting: "Yeah, I'm straight. I've always been straight. . . . But actually, I'm also pretty gay in *how* I'm straight." While only a minority of the men in my study relied on gay aesthetics in this way, heterosexual men in all three groups defined aspects of themselves as "gay" in similar ways.

Identifying Gay Aesthetics

Sexual aesthetics are best identified by how they are used rather than from what they are composed. Thus, gay aesthetics do *not* refer to the universal components of gay identity and culture. Rather, they are used in ways that suggest universal elements of sexual identities and cultures.

So, when Matt, one of The Border Boys, stated, “I can tell a dude’s gay by the way he walks,” he implies universal standards. As I define sexual aesthetics, it is less important that Matt’s belief is accurate; what matters is that he believes it is. Many men in this study felt they could easily “spot” gay men.

When I began my study of Men Can Parent Too, Dave—the group organizer—and I talked in his office at a small law firm about the group and my research. I told him I was interested in studying men who were attempting to figure out “how to be a man.” Dave immediately responded that I’d “want to meet” Luke. Luke was getting a divorce because he had recently come out as gay. He came to the first two meetings only, but remained a part of the study.³ He came to the group after recently separating from his wife and concerned that he would lose access to his children.

When Luke first talked with me about deciding to come out, he discussed the realization of how it might affect his relationship with his children (because of both his wife’s feelings about homosexuality and Luke’s struggle to obtain steady employment). He had some difficult, but interesting, things to say. I asked whether he always knew he was gay: “Well, I *was* always gay, but also not . . . I mean, I was gay even when I was straight . . . I always had, you know, certain things about me that made me realize . . . you know, little things, but important still.” When asked about the “little things,” Luke illustrates his understanding of the nuances of gay aesthetics:

I mean, I didn’t play with dolls or anything . . . though I might have if my mother let me [laughs] . . . I mean, I like fish more than steak, you know? I don’t like cars or driving. I actually prefer to bike or walk. Just little things like that. I prefer to go to museums over action movies. I’d rather watch the Food Network than something like “The Man Show.” I’m just gay!

Here, Luke relies on gay aesthetics to identify the seeds of belonging to gay culture long before adopting a gay identity. Specific features of life narratives are an important piece of gay identities; having the “right” sexual aesthetics is often part of framing oneself as *authentically* gay. Interestingly, the gay aesthetics Luke discusses are also markers of class status (e.g., Halperin 2012; Valocchi 1999). Straight participants in this study also framed middle- and upper-class tastes as “gay.”

What were thought to comprise gay aesthetics differed from one individual to another. Sexual aesthetics may also differ by groups of individuals; they may be classed, raced, and gendered. For instance, in Pascoe’s (2007) study of masculinity and sexuality in high school

culture, she found that white boys considered dancing to be "gay," Black boys did not. Despite variation in what qualified as gay aesthetics, however, all of my participants discussed them as universal features of gay culture. For example, at Guys for Gender Justice meetings, men often discussed having been mistaken for gay. Shane shared one experience:

People sometimes think I'm gay. . . . They just think I, like, might be or something. . . . I take it as an opportunity to help gay people. . . . I'll usually say something like, "Because I'm stylish? Or because I'm nice to people? . . . What? Because I'm healthy and care about my clothes and the way I look?" You know? Like, "Oh, because I have good taste in music?"

Shane's point here illustrates one way he resists heterosexism: by strategically reframing the implications of being called "gay." Rather than as an insult, Shane reinterprets the "insult" as a compliment by guessing at why he might be taken for gay and claiming those traits as his own. While attempting to neutralize differences, however, Shane's comments simultaneously reinforce symbolic boundaries separating gay from straight by (re)classifying those tastes and behaviors as gay.

A separate way that gay aesthetics were identified was through the use of "gaydar"—a portmanteau combining "gay" and "radar." "Gaydar" was discussed by men in all three groups to suggest that an individual was particularly well attuned to gay aesthetics, or to more forcefully argue that gay men are easily identified. Henry, one of The Border Boys, illustrates one use:

I just have good gaydar. . . . I'm not gay, but I know the signs. . . . I have gay friends. . . . Actually, some gay guys I know think I have better gaydar than them. . . . I'm in the know, that's all I'm saying.

Henry's use here was similar to the ways that "gaydar" was employed by men in Guys for Gender Justice as well. "Gaydar" was used most frequently by the pro-feminist men. Andrew, a young economics professor at a community college, said:

My gaydar is pretty sensitive. . . . It's not that I'm, like, always on the lookout or whatever, but my gaydar picks it up [cups his hand above his head, imitating a satellite dish]. I think when you're involved in a group like [Guys for Gender Justice], you're just thinking about more than your average man on the street. Gaydar's part of that.

While Henry's and Andrew's uses of gaydar are fairly innocent, both participate in the reification of sexual differences. Beyond that, they demonstrate some of the ways these men framed themselves as *different from* and often *better than* "most men" by claiming a better cultural (and sometimes political) "fit" (Ward 2008) with gay culture, illustrated by their knowledge of and comfort with gay aesthetics.

Regardless of whether or not they called it "gaydar," men in this study felt confident they "could tell" whether or not someone was gay. For instance, in a separate conversation with Dave (Men Can Parent Too), he brought up Luke again:

I knew he was gay. . . . Okay, so, when he came into my office . . . he sat down like this [gingerly sits down, slightly pursing his lips]. He shook my hand like this [softly]. He's a nice guy . . . don't get me wrong . . . but, you know . . . I knew it. The handshake took me off guard, but with the whole sitting thing . . . I can typically call that kind of thing.

As Connell notes, "The social *identity* of being gay . . . is now so well formed that it can be imposed on people. . . . Gayness is now so reified that it is easy for men to experience the process of adopting this social definition as discovering a truth about themselves" (1992, 743–44). But it is not only individuals who discover "truths" about themselves; the reification of gayness also enables the "discovery" of truths about the identities of others. Thus, similar to Matt's self-proclaimed ability to "tell a dude's gay by the way he walks," Dave claims to have read Luke's sexual aesthetics as a truth about his sexual identity.

Sexual aesthetics are often understood as a proxy for other dimensions of sexuality and used to promote understandings of sexuality wherein "gay" and "straight" are constructed as unavoidably different. The ability to identify gay aesthetics and a belief in their meaning and importance relies on an understanding of essential differences. And while straight men's use of gay aesthetics might belie an essentialist understanding of sexuality, these data support a different conclusion. Though gay aesthetics play a critical role in defining group boundaries for claims to rights and recognition, they take on distinct consequences, which I discuss further, when wielded by straight men.

On the Elements of Gay Aesthetics

In an interview with Richard (The Border Boys), he told me: "I'm emotional, man. I cry at movies. I cry when my friends hurt my feelings.

. . . That's what you need to know. I'm not your average man . . . all masculine and all that. . . And if that makes me gay, then fuck it, I'm gay . . . but, of course, I'm not *gaaaay*." When pressed to explain, Richard delineated some of the elements that make up gay aesthetics:

Well, of course, it's gay if you go like this [cocks his wrists] and if you're all pansy or whatever. It's gay to talk like this [affects his voice]. But, it's also gay if you're, like, into how you look too much. . . . It's gay if you're all emotional . . . like if you cry or . . . or even if you care too much about your friends. That's gay! It's gay to read, or . . . like, if you like novels rather than books. That's fucking gay. It's also gay to be into gay rights . . . or even women's rights. That's totally gay! Basically, being kinda gay could be a lot of things. . . . For me . . . I'm gay in like how I'm not all into bein' manly.

As Richard explains, gay aesthetics are composed of diverse elements. For the purposes of this article, I discuss three: (1) Sexual aesthetics can be *tastes*, as Richard characterizes concern with appearance or interest in certain kinds of literature as gay; (2) sexual aesthetics can be *behavioral*, such as Richard's mention of bodily comportment and speech patterns; (3) sexual aesthetics can be *ideological*, as Richard identifies support for certain issues as gay. Though Richard identifies three elements, he and the Border Boys relied on only two when identifying aspects of themselves as gay. Each group relied on different elements (see Table 1), and tastes were by far the most common.

TABLE 1: Group Use of Elements of Gay Aesthetics.

	<i>Tastes</i>	<i>Behaviors</i>	<i>Ideologies</i>
Men Can Parent Too	✓		
The Border Boys	✓	✓	
Guys for Gender Justice	✓	✓	✓

Tastes

Similar to Luke's analysis of his preferences for museums, seafood, and certain kinds of television programs, straight men in each group identified some of their own tastes as gay. Ralph, a member of Men Can Parent Too, made similar comments:

Ralph: The guys I work with are just not the same kinda guy as me. . . . All of 'em . . . want action. . . . I'm just trying to be a dad and

make a paycheck. . . . I actually am not all into this action . . . you know . . . like, a action kinda mindset . . . I don't drink beer. . . . I really don't like it. I mainly drink wine. But, I'm gay like that and it doesn't bug me.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Ralph: Oh, no . . . no, no, no. I'm not a fag or something like that. I just mean I'm into kinda gay stuff like that, you know? I mean, you've been over to my house. I'm a neat freak. It's just how I am.

Only men in *The Border Boys* and *Men Can Parent Too* used the word "fag." Ralph's use strategically distances himself from homosexuality, illustrating how men can utilize gay aesthetics while simultaneously promoting gender and sexual inequality. Thus, Ralph's reliance on gay aesthetics to discursively distance himself from a stereotype of masculinity is not necessarily indicative of a weakening relationship between masculinity and homophobia or sexual prejudice (e.g., Anderson 2009). Rather, it illustrates the ways that hybrid masculine practices can perpetuate inequality in new ways (Demetriou 2001; Messner 1993).

All three groups talked about various tastes as gay as a way of creating some symbolic distance between themselves and "other men." Only men in *Guys for Gender Justice*, however, also attempted to garner status as politically progressive by employing gay aesthetics. Many members of *Guys for Gender Justice* excitedly shared experiences of being "confused for gay." Indeed, at several group meetings, this kind of storytelling often turned into a contest. The youngest member of the group, Peter, explained:

People always think I'm gay . . . always! . . . People meet me and they just don't know what to do with me. They see what I wear and . . . and they see how I talk. . . . Maybe I'm just too nice. Maybe that's the problem. I always tell people that I constantly have to come out. . . . I come out as straight every time I meet someone new . . . I mean, I was in the closet and I didn't even know it. That's me, though . . . [pursing his lips] I like to sprinkle some gay on my straight.

Peter's comments frame his appearance and demeanor as gay. Like Ralph, Peter uses gay aesthetics to discursively situate himself as a hybrid masculinity. The practice allows both men to distance themselves from stereotypes of masculinity. But, unlike Ralph, Peter also attempts to frame himself as politically progressive. Peter proudly flaunts being "mistaken for gay," and later matter-of-factly stated, "It's basically impossible to be

homophobic if people think you're gay." In the process, however, Peter implicitly neutralizes power relations that make "the closet" a meaningful metaphor. The closet is born from social oppression, requiring individuals to conceal their identities (Seidman 2002). Peter's use casually disguises heterosexual privilege and implicitly deflates claims to sexual inequality made by truly gay individuals. While much less overt than Ralph's use of the word "fag," Peter's discursive performance more indirectly constructs his own straight identity through a disavowal of gay identity.

Similarly, and somewhat ironically, Travis, a member of The Border Boys, identified himself as gay because of his interest in women:

I'm into hanging out with women . . . I'm not a man's man or whatever. I'm more of a woman's man. I like art, jazz, and . . . I hate to say it this way, but I just actually think I'm a lot better than [The Border Boys]. . . . Sure, some of that is gay . . . but I mean . . . sometimes I feel like I really get along with gay men. . . . We just have a lot of things in common, with one *really* big difference.

Travis defines himself as distinct from The Border Boys. This was a common practice among all of The Border Boys, though not all of them sought to illustrate the ways they perceived themselves to be different with gay aesthetics. It is also significant that while Travis never said "fag" (as Ralph did), he is similarly careful to disavow gay identity by explaining the "*really* big difference" between *having* gay tastes and *being* gay.

These men are all participating in an essentialist discourse that re-establishes boundaries between gay and straight individuals and cultures. While all of the men are interested in framing themselves as different from "most men," some of them (particularly those in Guys for Gender Justice) also use gay aesthetics to frame themselves as politically tolerant. Thus, as Gary (Guys for Gender Justice) said, "If people thinking you're gay doesn't bug you, it's a good sign that you're on the right side." Yet, as Peter illustrates, men in Guys for Gender Justice also "outed" themselves as straight in various ways.

Despite these differences, the men in this study seemed to understand the relationship between gay aesthetics and gender and sexual inequality as relatively autonomous. Conversely, Connell's (1992) "straight gay" participants understood systems of aesthetic evaluation as producing the very hierarchies from which they are said to emerge. Connell (1992) argued that the "straight gay" men in her study relied upon what I call "straight aesthetics" for safety and gender identification. They were cognizant of the relationship between their performances of gender and

sexuality and violence and inequality. This illustrates something important about the straight men's use of gay aesthetics in this study—the practice was not associated with an understanding of sexual aesthetics as part of systems of power and inequality.

Behaviors

A second dimension of gay aesthetics is behavioral—inscribing sexual meaning to individuals' actions. For instance, Doug, a therapist and member of Guys for Gender Justice, explained to the group, "You can't hide your sexuality . . . You can try, but it comes out. Gay guys are more flamboyant and they can't hold it in. . . . It's science." Doug's comment illustrates how beliefs about gay aesthetics come to be more than just beliefs. In fact, there is a history of people looking for behavioral "tells" of gay identity such that many individuals carefully control presentations of self to guard against inadvertently disclosing their latent desires. The behavioral dimensions of gay aesthetics are typically signifiers of gender as well, illustrating the co-construction of gender and sexuality (Pascoe 2007; Schippers 2000; Ward 2008). Gender transgressive behavior was understood as a gay aesthetic among all three groups, though only members of Guys for Gender Justice and The Border Boys discussed some of their own behaviors as gay.

Henry (The Border Boys) claimed the behavioral dimension of gay aesthetics: "That's just me. I'm not gay . . . but I've got flair, dude." Affecting his voice, he continued, "I've got tons of flair and I don't care." Laughing, Jeffrey rejoined, "This is my fucking voice, man. It's the way I talk." Jeffrey has a higher-pitched voice and enunciates. They laughed at themselves as fitting what they consider behavioral cues associated with homosexuality despite identifying as straight. While neither Henry nor Jeffrey used the phrase "mistaken for gay," this is part of the same discourse. They participate in promoting stereotypes of effeminacy as a natural part of being a gay man by identifying with aspects of these qualities.

Behavioral gay aesthetics were much more common among members of Guys for Gender Justice. A conversation between these two illustrates this dynamic:

Peter: I mean . . . I don't know. I walk, sit, and talk funny. I just do. Actually, I get a lot of shit for it. I'm just more . . . you know. I'm ladylike . . . but it's like, get over yourself.

Gary: I actually get that at school. I had a group of students ask me if I was gay. I asked, "And why would you think that?" They said that it was because . . . how I speak or wave my hands around . . . I was like, "What?" I teach English, you know? I'm being emphatic!

Peter: Exactly . . . but who cares? I like the attention . . .

Gary: I don't mind either. If the way I speak makes you think I'm gay, think away. . . . Some of the greatest writers of all times were gay. . . .

Peter and Gary are conscious of the ways they believe their behavior is interpreted and "don't mind." Indeed, many of the men in Guys for Gender Justice discussed identification with gay aesthetics as a reason for joining the group.

Peter's self-reference as "ladylike" also illustrates how gay aesthetics are gendered by conflating gender and sexual transgressions. Thus, the hybrid masculinities these men perform co-opt elements of gender culturally coded as "feminine," which are simultaneously sexualized when adopted by men. Messerschmidt writes:

Hegemony may be accomplished . . . by the incorporation of certain aspects of [marginalized and subordinated masculinities or femininity] into a functioning gender order rather than by active oppression . . . In practice, of course, incorporation and oppression can occur together (Messerschmidt 2010, 39).

Consistent with Demetriou's (2001) analysis, these hybrid masculine forms are not subverting systems of inequality. Rather, they illustrate the transformative potential of inequality. To understand this, we must consider power and inequality as flexible. Similar to their use of tastes, from the way these men identified their participation in behavior culturally coded as gay, they conceal the ways this practice helps reproduce existing systems of power and inequality.

Ideologies

A third dimension of gay aesthetics is ideological. Ideological stances taken by individuals can be marked with sexual meaning. Feminism was the most frequently discussed ideology with sexual connotations. Situating masculinity and feminism as opposed causes men's engagements with feminism to be understood as emasculating (Bridges 2010). The men in this study were acutely aware of this fact. For instance, when Dan (Guys

for Gender Justice) says, “They’re straight . . . they’re all straight. And it’s funny, ’cause we’re all involved in this totally gay thing,” he is referring to feminism. Similarly, and noted above, Richard (*The Border Boys*) states, “It’s . . . gay to be into gay rights . . . or even women’s rights. That’s totally gay!”

Of all the groups, only Guys for Gender Justice utilized ideological positions to identify aspects of themselves as gay. This highlights an important distinction between the groups. All three relied on gay aesthetics to distance themselves from what they understood as stigmatizing stereotypes of masculinity. But only the pro-feminist men also relied on gay aesthetics to situate themselves as *authentically* politically progressive. Indeed, they seemed to be attempting to discursively “queer” themselves to demonstrate their feminist convictions.

Saul (Guys for Gender Justice) epitomizes this position. When we met, he was wearing a T-shirt with “Feminist chicks dig me!” on the front and an AIDS awareness ribbon on his bag.

I initially got involved with a sexual violence resource center as a volunteer. . . . All the ladies I worked with there . . . they all totally thought I was gay. . . . It’s funny how people think you’re gay if you, like, are for gay marriage. . . . Apparently even being against sexual violence is gay. . . . It’s like clothes. . . . I don’t wear straight guy clothes and I don’t have straight guy politics . . . and to be perfectly honest, that’s one of a few reasons I’m different from most guys. I’m better.

Nearly every member of Guys for Gender Justice mentioned something about how their involvement with feminism related to their gender and sexual identities, framing their affiliation with gay issues as a mark of distinction. By subjectively framing themselves as having a variety of gay aesthetics, they discursively attempted to “prove” this.

Straight men’s use of gay aesthetics is different from, and *softer* than, the “fag discourse” Pascoe (2007) identifies and the overt homophobia that masculinities scholars consider a fundamental element of contemporary masculinity (e.g., Herek 1986; Kimmel 1994; Lehne 1976). The consequences of the practice, however, produce similar results—reproducing gender and sexual inequality and reaffirming heterosexuality as culturally dominant. As Messner (1993, 2007), Demetriou (2001), and Messerschmidt (2010) suggest, this research supports the notion that some of the ways in which contemporary systems of power and inequality are justified and perpetuated have transformed.

ON MOTIVATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

In this section, I explore the incentives men found in relying on gay aesthetics. All three groups used gay aesthetics to distance themselves from various groups of men. Men in Men Can Parent Too seem to be seeking distance from toxic heterosexual masculinities, allowing them to frame themselves as "good guys" by more explicitly labeling the "bad." Similarly, The Border Boys' use of gay aesthetics was often aimed at illustrating their moral worth. Guys for Gender Justice, however, traded on gay aesthetics as feminist political currency. Motivated to prove themselves "on the right side," they actively "queered" their straight identities. In spite of these differences in motivations, however, there are common consequences that worked to reproduce systems of inequality in new ways.

Thomas, a member of The Border Boys, is openly gay, Black, and though he was present fewer nights a week than the others, he was central to the group when he joined them at the bar. He spoke directly about straight men's interest in an affiliation with gay men and how he believes this has changed:

When I was in college, having a friend who was gay, even if people just thought he was gay, meant you were gay . . . like, having a gay friend [now] is totally in. . . . If you've got a gay friend . . . you aren't a piece of shit. People think gay people are really discriminating too, I think . . . If you hang out with a gay person, you must be really "down" or whatever.

Thomas's assertion seems to have been correct, but much more so for men in The Border Boys and Guys for Gender Justice than those in Men Can Parent Too.

Many members of Guys for Gender Justice felt that heterosexuality was somewhat dull and meaningless, and voiced a desire to distance themselves from stereotypes of masculinity. This seemed to be a primary motivation for relying on gay aesthetics. Jacob (Guys for Gender Justice) put it this way:

Being straight is lame. There's just nothing exciting about saying, "Mom, Dad . . . I turned out just like you expected." . . . There was a time when I actually really wanted to be gay . . . not to, like, get with guys or whatever . . . but just 'cause . . . gay people are just more fun. Straight men are probably the most boring, cardboard people ever. So, I certainly do stuff that makes people question if I'm gay or not, 'cause I might not be gay, but I'm not going to be a robot.

Jacob explains some of the reasons that he “queers” his performance of masculinity. It’s a contradictory practice, and all of the men in this study either smiled or laughed when I asked them to talk more about calling aspects of themselves gay. They did so in ways that implied the answer was self-evident, at least to them.

Similarly, Doug (Guys for Gender Justice) said, “Guys . . . hold that . . . straight guys are pretty boring for the most part. That’s part of the reason I joined this group. . . . They might be straight, but they fooled me when I first met ’em.” Doug and Jacob not only distance themselves from “most men,” but also use gay aesthetics to forge hybrid masculinities that are experienced as more exciting than the options they perceive themselves as having access to as young, straight, white men.

Like Jacob and Doug, almost all of the men presented themselves as unique from other men, as Bob’s (Men Can Parent Too) comments illustrate as we talked in the office of a restaurant he manages:

Being a regular guy is, like, being a regular dad . . . it’s not good enough. . . . If you want to go through your whole life playing by all the rules, you’re gonna be a kinda “Who cares?” kinda guy. Most guys just wanna prove they’re, like, tough guys or something. I’m not like that . . . I mean, in some ways I think my marriage ended ’cause I’m just not an average guy.

Men in each group echoed Bob’s expressing an urge to distance himself from “regular guys.” Yet, what qualified as a “regular guy” was subtly different among the three groups. For instance, Bob relied on gay aesthetics as a mechanism symbolically creating some discursive space between himself and “tough guys.” Bob later said,

It’s gay that I’m all into my family. I get teased [by some of my employees] for havin’ pictures of my kids all up in my office. They say, “That’s gay!” and all that. And I’m like, “Okay, I’m gay, then.” You know? If yer not a dickwad, you get called gay. . . . I’ll just be like, “I’d rather be gay than a dick.”

Bob is not attempting to distance himself from *all* heterosexual men here—just *those* heterosexual men (the “dickwads”). It’s a discursive strategy allowing him to create some rhetorical space in which he frames his own masculinity as not the “real problem.”

The men in Men Can Parent Too use gay aesthetics in ways that simultaneously disavow homosexuality, consistent with practices of “othering.” Yet, the men in Guys for Gender Justice (and, to a lesser extent, The

Border Boys) are doing something more complicated. They attempt to "queer" their straight masculine identities with gay aesthetics to prove their moral worth, or with the understanding that gay aesthetics serve as evidence of "authentic" feminist politics.

Despite these distinctions, however, the men in this study seemed to have a more common motivation to engage in this practice. For instance, all but two of the men who mobilized gay aesthetics also discussed masculinity as "uninteresting," "meaningless," or "boring." In this way, these findings can be generalized by connecting with other research addressing a diversity of gendered, racialized, classed, and sexualized aesthetics that young, straight, white men have co-opted (Hughey 2012; Pascoe 2007; Ward 2008; Wilkins 2009). Yet, as this research shows, there are often more pernicious consequences associated with these practices that do not require reflexive calculation.

The men in this study utilized gay aesthetics to fill the perceived emptiness of straight masculinities—but they maintained a heterosexual identity and thus continued to benefit from the privileges associated with heterosexuality. This finding corroborates Seidman's claim that gender and sexual inequality are alive and well, but something significant has changed: "the formation of a self-conscious, deliberate public culture of heterosexuality" (Seidman 2002, 115). Thus, while perhaps insensitive, Peter's comment "I come out as straight every time I meet someone new" is indicative of this transformation. This change, however, does not necessarily indicate that inequality no longer exists or that masculinity's relationship with homophobia is disappearing. Rather, it is part of a hybridization of masculinity that works in ways that obscure contemporary inequality (e.g., Demetriou 2001; Messner 1993; Messerschmidt 2010).

Bertrand Russell argued that oppression assumes diverse forms. One form that Russell found particularly curious was a strategy whereby oppressed groups were constructed as "virtuous":

It begins only when the oppressors come to have a bad conscience, and this only happens when their power is no longer secure. The idealizing of the victim is useful for a time: if virtue is the greatest of goods, and if subjection makes people virtuous, it is kind to refuse them power, since it would destroy their virtue. (Russell 1937, 731)

Russell argues that the "superior virtue of the oppressed" is a discourse enabling inequality to go unquestioned, providing new ideological supports for continued oppression when others begin to crumble.

Straight men's use of gay aesthetics may illustrate that stereotypes of homosexuality are not viewed negatively by all straight men. Yet, this simple change is not sufficient evidence of a unilateral move toward greater gender and sexual equality (e.g., Anderson 2009; McCormack 2012). Rather, these findings corroborate other research on contemporary hybrid masculine forms (Demetriou 2001; Messerschmidt 2010; Messner 1993, 2007), suggesting that they are pervasive and work to obscure (rather than weaken) existing systems of power and inequality. Thus, as Demetriou writes, "Hybridization in the realm of representation and in concrete, everyday practices make [new iterations of inequality] appear less oppressive and more egalitarian" (Demetriou 2001, 355).

For instance, Seidman's claim that Americans are becoming both more attentive to homosexuality and "skilled at reading signs of sexual identity" (Seidman 2002, 56) is a significant part of this cultural process. There is, however, no intrinsic relationship between this ability and sexual equality. Thus, while it may be tempting to label some of the men in this study as participating in "undoing gender" (Deutsch 2007) and perhaps sexuality as well by illustrating that straight men can "look" and "act" gay too, this is an inaccurate reading of what is being accomplished. There are at least three distinct consequences.

First, the belief in the pre-social nature of gay aesthetics is part of an essentialist discourse that identifies and fortifies symbolic sexual boundaries between gay and straight aesthetics, and solidifies social boundaries between gay and straight individuals. These men's identity work could contribute to disrupting gendered sexual boundaries by illustrating our collective capacity to "play" with gender and sexual aesthetics. Yet, in practice, these men's behaviors are best understood as reinvigorating symbolic sexual boundaries and recuperating gender and sexual privilege in historically novel ways.

Second, these men—seemingly unintentionally—capitalize on symbolic sexual boundaries to distance themselves from specific configurations of hegemonic masculinity, but not necessarily the associated privileges. The effect is to disguise gender and sexual privilege by crafting hybrid masculinities with gay aesthetics. By framing themselves as gay, they obscure the ways they benefit from being young, mostly white, heterosexual men.

Third, straight men's reliance on gay aesthetics to enrich their heterosexual gender identities implicitly softens more authentic claims to sexual inequality. As Doug put it, "Face it, gay guys are just more colorful. . . . They're just more fun." The men in *Guys for Gender Justice*

were motivated to engage in this practice out of more than a desire to distance themselves from stigmatized masculinities (i.e., to prove feminist authenticity). But, comments like Doug's were common among this group and illustrate that the practice is also a hybrid masculine strategy associated with cultural miscegenation and its associated problems and critiques.

In a similar way, bell hooks argues that whites desire "a bit of the Other" to help fill the emptiness of white identity (hooks 1992). Hughey's (2012) analysis comparing a nationalist and antiracist organization fits within this framework as well. Men in both groups framed whiteness as "cultureless," seeking to associate with nonwhite culture to alleviate these feelings. Though both groups participated in this practice for different reasons, Hughey (2012) illustrates how this cultural appropriation works to further entrench and disguise systems of power and inequality. Indeed, Wilkins (2004) identified a similar process at work among white youth performing and identifying with aspects of Puerto Rican culture and identity.

For the men in this study, heterosexuality lacked the luster of an identity forged in a struggle for equal rights and recognition. However, while they symbolically invert the sexual hierarchy for aesthetics (i.e., gay is more desirable than straight), they simultaneously maintain heteronormative hierarchies for sexual acts, desires, and orientations. By casually framing being gay only as fun and exciting, this practice allows these men to ignore the persistence of extreme sexual inequality and the hardships that actual gay men face every day.

CONCLUSION

This research answers the call for increased attention to "the queer practices of people who identify as heterosexual" (Schippers 2000, 760). Hybrid masculinities illustrate the flexibility of contemporary masculinities (perhaps particularly young, white, straight masculinities), and straight men's reliance on gay aesthetics is one kind of hybridization. These "gay straight" men might appear to blur the boundaries between gay and straight through assimilating a variety of gay aesthetics. Yet, this move toward "inclusivity" (Anderson 2009) can be interpreted in more than one way and does not necessarily indicate declining levels of gender and sexual inequality. Research and theory suggest a more nuanced interpretation of the motivations behind and consequences of these kinds of

practices. Straight men who identify aspects of themselves as gay in this study draw on varied resources to simultaneously assert heterosexual masculine identities, to distance themselves from stigmatizing stereotypes of masculinity, and—for some—to communicate authentic allegiance with groups to which they claim no formal membership.

Future research is necessary to examine how prevalent these practices are, and the diverse ways in which gay aesthetics are understood and utilized by straight men. It will also be important to continue to address the ways in which the aesthetic elements of identity categories operate throughout social life in ways that both empower and oppress.

Drawing connections to a large body of research on contemporary transformations in masculinity, this article suggests that hybrid masculinities are a significant social phenomenon. Consistent with other research implying that hybridization may be a social practice more available to socially privileged groups of men (e.g., young, straight, and white), this research also implies that the existence of hybrid masculinities does not inherently imply that social inequalities are diminishing. Rather, as Messner (1993, 2007), Demetriou (2001), and Messerschmidt (2010) all argue, this research supports the notion that hybrid masculinities are perpetuating inequality in new (and less easily identifiable) ways. Using Messner's (1993) language, these practices are illustrative of a transformation in the "style but not substance" of contemporary gender and sexual inequality.

While the gay men in Connell's (1992) research rely on straight aesthetics for gender *identification*, the straight men in this study are doing something else. Their use of gay aesthetics is better understood as gender *dis-identification*. These men's reliance upon gay aesthetics expands "acceptable" performances of straight masculinity, but does so without challenging the systems of inequality from which they emerge.

NOTES

1. "Homohysteria" is a measure of popular awareness of gay identity, disapproval of homosexuality, and the extent to which homophobia is fundamental to masculine identification.

2. Messner (1997) situates fathers' rights groups and pro-feminist groups of men at the poles of men's gender-political activism in the United States.

3. Luke is not an example of a straight-identified man using "gay aesthetics." I bring him up here because he is helpful in defining what sexual aesthetics are and why they matter.

REFERENCES

- Anders, John. 1999. *Willa Cather's sexual aesthetics and the male homosexual literary tradition*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Anderson, Eric. 2009. *Inclusive masculinity*. New York: Routledge.
- Arxer, Steven L. 2011. Hybrid masculine power: Reconceptualizing the relationship between homosociality and hegemonic masculinity. *Humanity & Society* 35:390-422.
- Attwood, Feona. 2007. No money shot? Commerce, pornography and new sex taste cultures. *Sexualities* 10:441-56.
- Barber, Kristen. 2008. The well-coiffed man: Class, race, and heterosexual masculinity in the hair salon. *Gender & Society* 22:455-76.
- Blumer, Herbert. 1954. What is wrong with social theory? *American Sociological Review* 19:3-10.
- Bridges, Tristan. 2010. Men just weren't made to do this: Performances of drag at "Walk a Mile in Her Shoes" marches. *Gender & Society* 24:5-30.
- Burke, Peter. 2009. *Cultural hybridity*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender trouble*. New York: Routledge.
- Connell, Raewyn W. 1992. A very straight gay. *American Sociological Review* 57:735-51.
- Connell, Raewyn W., and James Messerschmidt. 2005. Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society* 19:829-59.
- Demetriou, Demetrakis. 2001. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity: A critique. *Theory and Society* 30:337-61.
- Deutsch, Francine. 2007. Undoing gender. *Gender & Society* 21:106-27.
- Gates, Eugene. 1988. The female voice. *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 22:59-68.
- Halperin, David. 2012. *How to be gay*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Heath, Melanie. 2003. Soft-boiled masculinity: Renegotiating gender and racial ideologies in the Promise Keepers movement. *Gender & Society* 17:423-44.
- Hennen, Peter. 2005. Bear bodies, bear masculinity. *Gender & Society* 19:25-43.
- Herek, Gregory. 1986. On heterosexual masculinity. *American Behavioral Scientist* 29:563-77.
- hooks, bell. 1992. Eating the other. In *Black looks: Race and representation*. Boston: South End Press.
- Hughey, Matthew. 2012. *White bound*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Kimmel, Michael. 1994. Masculinity as homophobia. In *Theorizing masculinities*, edited by Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lehne, Gregory. 1976. Homophobia among Men. In *The forty-nine percent majority*, edited by Deborah David and Robert Brannon. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- McCormack, Mark. 2012. *The declining significance of homophobia*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Messerschmidt, James. 2010. *Hegemonic masculinities and camouflaged politics*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.
- Messner, Michael. 1993. "Changing men" and feminist politics in the United States. *Theory and Society* 22:723-37.
- Messner, Michael. 1997. Politics of masculinities. New York: Alta Mira.
- Messner, Michael. 2007. The masculinity of the Governorator. *Gender & Society* 21: 461-80.
- Ocampo, Anthony. 2012. Making masculinity: Negotiations of gender presentation among Latino gay men. *Latino Studies* 10:448-72.
- Pascoe, CJ. 2007. *Dude, you're a fag*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Pfeil, Fred. 1995. *White guys*. New York: Verso Books.
- Russell, Bertrand. 1937. The superior virtue of the oppressed. *The Nation* 26: 731-32.
- Savran, David. 1998. *Taking it like a man*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Schippers, Mimi. 2000. The social organization of sexuality and gender in alternative hard rock. *Gender & Society* 14:747-64.
- Seidman, Steven. 1996. Introduction. In *Queer theory/sociology*, edited by Steven Seidman. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Seidman, Steven. 2002. *Beyond the closet*. New York: Routledge.
- Small, Mario Luis. 2009. How many cases do I need? *Ethnography* 10:5-38.
- Stein, Arlene, and Ken Plummer. 1994. "I can't even think straight": "Queer" theory and the missing sexual revolution in sociology. *Sociological Theory* 12:178-87.
- Strauss, Anselm, and Juliet Corbin. 1998. *The basics of qualitative research*. New York: Routledge.
- Valocchi, Steve. 1999. The class-inflected nature of gay identity. *Social Problems* 46:207-24.
- Ward, Jane. 2008. Dude-sex: White masculinities and "authentic" heterosexuality among dudes who have sex with dudes. *Sexualities* 11:414-34.
- Wilkins, Amy. 2004. Puerto Rican Wannabes. *Gender & Society* 18:103-21.
- Wilkins, Amy. 2009. Masculinity dilemmas. *Signs* 34:343-68.

Tristan Bridges is an assistant professor of sociology at The College at Brockport, State University of New York. His research deals primarily with contemporary transformations in young men's understandings of gender and sexual inequality and in their identity projects. This study traced the meanings of these changes among three very different groups of young men.