ABSTRACT

Are men’s cross-sexual orientation friendships a site for reproducing or challenging hegemonic masculinity? Drawing on 40 interviews with 20 self-identified queer and 20 straight men at a large public university in the south, this study finds that while the masculine hierarchy is central to both the formation (or non-formation) and maintenance of cross-sexual orientation friendships, the hierarchy is of greater importance to the queer men in these associations. Regarding the formation of these friendships, queer men expressed anxiety regarding entering into these associations, commonly citing past experiences of homophobia, fear of coming out, and the lack of desire for friendship on the part of the straight male as the chief reasons for their apprehension for entering into these associations. In contrast with other studies, the present study found that straight men reported little anxiety about entering into these associations: most reported that these friendships would likely offer them greater disclosure than their other friendships. Once formed, queer men in these friendships often policed themselves so as to not make their sexual identity salient, queer men put more work into maintaining these friendships, and interactions between straight and queer male friends were found to differ when in public and private spaces. These results point to cross-sexual orientation friendships between men as an avenue through which the masculine hierarchy is not diminished, but rather mutually upheld by queer and straight men alike.
INTRODUCTION

Hegemonic masculinity is a central feature if the persistence of hierarchies of both gender and sexuality. Hegemonic masculinity are those qualities which are characterized as manly and that generate and legitimate a complementary and hierarchical relationship to femininity, ensuring the dominant position of men (Schippers 2007). Although hegemonic masculinity serves to ensure the dominant position of men in relation to women, it also serves to ensure the dominant position of men over other men, as those men who do not align with what is considered to be hegemically masculine are often labeled as feminine and devalued. One of the core tenants of this masculinity is a heterosexual identity, subordinating all men with a non-heterosexual identity (Schippers 2007). Thus, hegemonic masculinity reinforces a gendered hierarchy, which posits women and non-heterosexual men in a subordinated position to heterosexual men.

Previous literature has examined how masculinity is upheld in interactions between men and women. Much less is known about how hegemonic masculinity, and the qualities that define it, is maintained through interactions between men. Hegemonic masculinity is both produced and upheld through exclusionary practices aimed at both women and non-heterosexual men (Donaldson 1993). Although certain exclusionary practices, such as exclusion from occupational settings, have been shown to take place throughout the life course (Martin 2001), other forms of exclusion, such as the use of homophobic rhetoric and overt bullying, are most salient among high school and college-aged men (Siegleman et al. 1991, Burn 2000, Pascoe 2011). During this stage of the life course, men uphold masculinity through the use of homophobic rhetoric (such as the word “fag”), and the strict avoidance of all that is deemed to be feminine (Pascoe 2011). College and high school aged men use homophobic discourse to both win approval from their
peers and, in so doing, distance themselves from a homosexual identity (Siegelman et al. 1991, Burn 2000, Pascoe 2011). Through the use of homophobic discourse and distancing techniques, men both reify their heterosexual identity, and uphold and reproduce the link between homosexuality and femininity.

Interactions between men are important for upholding hegemonic masculinity because these interactions both define and legitimate what it means to be manly, and what it means to be feminine (Pascoe 2011). While the overt processes and mechanisms that reproduce hegemonic masculinity have been well established in existing literature, little is known about how this gendered hierarchy is negotiated in spaces that are often demarcated as being more egalitarian. Understanding the ways in which hegemonic masculinity is maintained in arenas that are often thought of as being equal aids in our understanding of the more implicit ways that inequality is reproduced, and how it is reproduced in voluntary, non-coercive interactions, by illustrating the ways in which inequality can be upheld and reproduced through domains that are most often regarded as equal. This aids in our understanding of the masked ways in which inequalities are sustained. The present study, therefore, examines how masculinity is both reinscribed and maintained through a site that is often perceived as transcending the masculine hierarchy: friendships between straight and queer men¹.

I argue that cross-sexual orientation friendships between men serve as a theoretically useful site of analysis to explore the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity due to the fluid and reciprocal nature of friendships (Weiss 1998, Rubin 1985). Thus, individuals generally have agency in choosing to both enter and sustain such associations (Weiss 1998), given what they

¹ For the purposes of this study, the term queer will be used to denote all men who identified as sexual minorities. Respondents identified in a multitude of ways (gay, queer, bisexual, etc.), and after coding the interviews, no notable differences were observed between classifications. Thus, I use the term queer for the sake of consistency.
believe are the costs and benefits to the friendship. Further, cross-sexual orientation friendships between men allow for an examination of how, in associations that are largely thought of as being egalitarian and reciprocal in nature, hegemonic gender dynamics are either upheld or diminished. Given the subordinated position of queer men and the privileged position of straight men on the masculine hierarchy, cross-sexual orientation friendships allow for an understanding of how this gender dynamic operates in associations that privilege reciprocity, loyalty, understanding and acceptance (Rubin 1985, Tilman-Healy 2005).

Given the hierarchical structure of masculinity, as it posits straight men in a dominant position to those men who are queer, I ask the following question: Does cross-sexual orientation friendship reinscribe hegemonic masculinity? In answering this question, I examine how straight and queer men engage with this hierarchy in the formation of friendships, and how this hierarchy is negotiated within these friendships once they are formed.

To understand the impact that hegemonic masculinity has on cross-sexual orientation friendships between men, the present study draws on interviews with a diverse group of 40 men, representing different racial identities, majors, and age groups (20 who identify as queer, 20 who identify as straight) enrolled in a large public university in a large metropolitan area in the South. Using college students as the population of interest, this study examines masculinity in a context where individuals are looking to form friendships and are generally exposed to heightened levels of diversity compared to high school. Further, college students are a fruitful population to study because college is a stage in the life course where both identity and friendship formation are valued (Lyman 1987, Capraro 2000). This heightened exposure to diversity, including diversity in terms of sexual orientation, combined with the increasing size of college students friendship
networks means that college is a time where men of differing sexual identities will likely come into contact, and thus, interact.

Friendships are often segregated among many different lines for differing reasons. One avenue through which friendships are often segregated is by gender. When these associations do form, however, there often exists a hierarchy in these cross-gender friendships. Due to their subordinated position on the masculine hierarchy, women feel they have to do far more work, or engage in more emotion work, to incentivize the friendship for the men in the association, and in so doing, uphold the masculine hierarchy (Hochschild 2003). The rarity of cross-group friendships is not limited to gender, as cross-race friendships are often noted as being uncommon due, in part, to prejudice or group competition (Page-Gould and Tropp 2008), whereas cross-sexual orientation friendships between men are uncommon due, in part, to homophobia and masculinity (Marsiglio 1993). While power dynamics may operate similarly in other cross-group friendships, the present study examines how the masculine hierarchy operates in cross-sexual orientation friendships between men. Research illustrates that friendships between gay and straight men are relatively rare, as individuals tend to choose to engage in friendships with members of the same gender and sexual orientation (Galupo 2009; Kupersmidt, Derosier and Patterson 1995). Just as straight men tend to befriend other straight men, research shows that gay men tend to mostly befriend heterosexual women and other gay men (Nardi and Sherrod 1994).

Likely due in part to the relative rarity of these friendships (Muraco 2005), research on male friendship across sexual orientation has been limited to a handful of studies (Nardi 1999, Price 1999, Tilman-Healy 2001, Muraco 2005, Barrett 2013). This difficulty in examining cross-sexual orientation friendships makes the present study especially important, as it aids in our understanding of why these friendships are uncommon. Additionally, previous research has
examined already existing gay-straight male friendships by qualitatively examining solely the opinion of straight men, or through the use of friendship dyads, or an already existing friendship duo (Marsiglio 1993, Barrett 2013). While useful, a limitation of utilizing friendship dyads is the possibility of selection bias, whereby stronger, longer-lasting friendship dyads are more likely to agree to participate, and men more inclined to cross-sexual orientation friendships in the first place are more likely to be in the sample. The present study opens up the sample to men regardless of their involvement in cross-sexual orientation friendships. Further, the present study does not limit the discussion by analyzing dyads, but rather, focuses on the numerous cross-sexual orientation friendships that a participant may have during and leading up to college\(^2\). By doing so, this study is able to examine perceptions on friendships at all levels of intimacy and disclosure, rather than examining dyads of close, existing friendships.

BACKGROUND

*Hegemonic Masculinity and Homophobia*

As previously noted, hegemonic masculinity involves the characteristics that are both labeled as manly and establish a “legitimate and hierarchical relationship to femininity” (Schippers 2007:94). This hierarchical relationship guarantees a dominant position for men, and a subordinate position for women. However, hegemonic masculinity is not only a way by which men are able to exhibit control over women, but over other men as well (Donaldson 1993). These criteria upon which men are judged are often fluid. They change throughout the course of one’s lifetime, with strength and athleticism heavily emphasized during ones younger years, and economic success and romantic relationships with women having a greater emphasis in

\(^2\) For the purposes of this study, I let respondents define what friendship meant to them. Thus, I refer to the associations men in my sample describe as friendship because the respondents have labeled them as such.
determining ones masculinity as one grows older (Pleck 1974, McDaniel 2003, Calsanti 2004). As Pronger (1990) notes, “Masculinity, then, is a strategy that serves the interests of the patriarchal heterosexuality” (p.141). It is not only women, however, who are devalued by hegemonic masculinity, but also non-heterosexual men.

This power dynamic of the masculine ideal historically came to be through a process of exclusion, mainly of women and homosexuals (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). While all men do benefit, to some extent, from masculinity, there are also non-hegemonic masculinities which are marginalized by hegemonic masculinity. Through both processes of oppression and exclusion, homosexual men are positioned at the bottom of the masculine hierarchy. This exclusion takes various forms, the use of homophobic slurs (Tomsen 2002), the policing of other men for acting feminine (Kimmel and Mahler 2003, Pascoe 2011), or exclusion in organizational settings (Martin 2001). These processes of exclusion work to ensure the dominance, and reproduction, of hegemonic masculinity.

Homophobia is part of the performance of hegemonic masculinity (Pascoe 2011). Through the use of homophobic rhetoric and exclusionary practices aimed at gay men in particular, homophobia serves as a mechanism by which hegemonic masculinity comes to be reproduced (Herek 1997, Burn 2000, Pascoe 2011). Further, the use of homophobia in enacting hegemonic masculinity upholds the link between masculinity and heterosexuality, as it posits heterosexuality as a central tenant of what it means to be masculine (Pascoe 2011). Heterosexual males often utilize homophobic discourse not only to distance themselves from non-heterosexuals, but also use this type of discourse to police one another. Being labeled as a fag has as much, if not more, to do with failing at hegemonic masculine tasks as it does with one’s sexual identity (Pascoe 2011). In Dude You’re a Fag (2011), Pascoe illustrates how the label of
a “fag” was about meaning making and social relations within the context of a high school; being a “fag” was that which was not masculine, and boys would stringently avoid having the label placed on them. The fear of being labeled as a fag serves as a way to enforce and coerce boys into performing hegemonic masculinity.

Though most common in high school and college-aged males (Burn 2000, Pascoe 2011), the fag discourse is not limited to high school. Anti-gay or homophobic discourse is used as a tool meant to distance straight men from those who identify as queer out of fear that they may be considered to be homosexual by association (Siegalman et al. 1991).

Friendship

Homophobia and masculinity embed themselves in many aspects of social life, including friendships. Kimmel (1996) emphasizes that part of the masculine ideal of hegemonic masculinity entails the avoidance of femininity, and as Miglaccio (2009) notes, this results in men avoiding such feminine characteristics as self-disclosure and intimacy within their same sex male friendships. Although men report wanting intimacy and disclosure within their same sex friendships (Patrick and Becker 2009), they describe having much lower levels of intimacy and self-disclosure within their same sex friendships than do women (Rubin 1983). As Aries and Johnson (1983) illustrate, men are less likely than women to discuss doubts, fears, or their intimate lives within their same sex male friendships out of a fear that in so doing, they will be perceived as less masculine. They assert that most men do see a close friend as someone in which to confide in about personal matters, but they are frequently restrained from doing so due to their sex-gender roles.

Although research shows that people tend to befriend members of the same gender (Matthews 1995), it is also worth noting that friendships tend to be different for men and women.
Male friendship is heavily based upon shared activities, such as participation in sports, whereas female friendships are largely predicated on intimacy, and the sharing of feelings (Daly 1978, Fehr 2004, Pleck and Sawyer 1974). Male friendships, however, are rarer than female friendships. Rubin (1996), in her study which spanned over 300 interviews with women and men between the ages of 25 and 55, found that roughly two thirds of the men in the sample were not able to identify men who they believed to be a best friend. This lack of male friendships is largely attributed to straight men’s fear of being labeled as gay (Lewis 1978, Mormon et al. 2013, Niobe 1978). Due to the fact that intimacy is seen as a feminine characteristic (Kimmel 1996), shared intimacy between two men is often reacted to with homophobia by straight men, out of a fear that they will be perceived as being homosexual (Lewis 1978).

*Cross Sexual-Orientation Friendships*

While same sex male friendships between gay and straight men do exist, they are especially rare (Kupersmidt, Derosier and Patterson 1995; Galupo 2009). As Marsiglio (1993) found in his national survey of 15 to 19 year old heterosexual men, heterosexual men tend to hold negative conceptions about friendships with gay men, as they fear that this association would call their heterosexual and masculine identity into question. This anxiety of being perceived as homosexual or less masculine serves as a chief impediment to formation of these friendships. Price (1999), in a participatory study utilizing 44 cross-sexual orientation male friendship dyads, illuminated that within gay-straight male friendships, straight men were free to openly discuss their dating and sex life, but found their straight male friends were largely uncomfortable with the idea of their gay friend disclosing information about their romantic lives. Further, while research shows that straight men are less comfortable around gay men (Herek
increased exposure to and interaction with gay men leads to having more favorable attitudes towards gay men (Loftus 2001). 

The present study aims to explore how hegemonic masculinity is reinscribed though and constructed with the formation and maintenance of cross-sexual orientation friendships between men. As Lewis (1978) notes, masculinity and homophobia create barriers for straight men in same-sex friendships. Little research, however, has examined how masculinity plays out in cross-sexual orientation friendships between men. Though the bulk of the literature has illustrated that cross sexual orientation male friendships have more trouble persevering than friendships between men of the same sexual orientation (Marsiglio 1993, Price 1999, Muraco 2005), research has also highlighted that when these friendships do persist, they have the potential to be extremely beneficial to both gay and straight men in these friendships, as they often offer greater comfort and self-disclosure than other friendships, as men are less burdened with feeling like they need to perform masculinity in these contexts (Muraco 2005).

Friendships are an ideal context in which to study beliefs about cross-sexual orientation relations, as these associations are voluntary, and thus, neither the queer or straight men who enter these friendships are required to enter or remain in these relationships (Wiseman 1986). While previous research has examined same sex friendships between gay and straight men (Nardi 1999, Price 1999, Tilman-Healy 2001, Muraco 2005, Barrett 2013), no known study has qualitatively examined these friendships from both the perspective of queer and straight men, while accounting for both men who are and are not involved in cross-sexual orientation friendships. Further, by expanding beyond friendship dyads, this study is able to examine

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This has been shown to hold true for cross-group friendships in other domains, such as cross-race friendships as well (Page-Gould et al. 2008, Davies et al. 2011)
friendships at all levels of intimacy, closeness, and disclosure, not just close and lasting friendships dyads that have commonly been the focus of research on this topic. Examining those who do not have cross-sexual orientation friendships will help to illuminate both the perceived barriers to cross-sexual orientation friendships, and the actual complexities surrounding these friendships.

METHODOLOGY

This paper utilizes 40 in-depth, semi-structured interviews at Randall State University\(^4\), which is described in more detail below. Twenty of the respondents in my study are self-identified queer men, meaning they identify as both a man and a sexual minority, and the twenty other respondents were self-identified heterosexual men. I utilize both queer and straight men for this study to gain a fuller understanding of how common it is for both queer and straight men in my sample to report having these friendships. The present study examines how people talk about and understand cross-sexual orientation friendships. I examine respondent’s perceptions regarding their likelihood to enter into a friendship across sexual orientation, along with their perceptions regarding these friendships for those who are both involved and not involved in these types of associations.

Respondents were allowed to self-identify their racial identity. The racial breakdown of my sample is 57% White, 15% Hispanic, 12% Black, and 10% Asian and 5% who identified as mixed-race.\(^5\) A demographically diverse sample was important so that potential racial differences could be observed, and so that the experiences of one racial category were not being privileged and generalized so as to account for all racial groups. Reflecting the age diversity at Randall State University, respondents ranged from 18 to 31 years old. There was also a great deal of

\(^4\) I use Randall State University a pseudonym to protect the confidentiality of participants in this study
\(^5\) For a more detailed description of my sample, see Appendix Tables C1 and C2
variation in my sample regarding academic majors, as respondents ranged from engineering majors, to liberal arts majors. Most of my sample reported having grown up and lived in the South their entire life, though there were a few who came from other regions and other countries. My sample of queer students for this overrepresented white students when compared to the average proportion of white students at Randall State University. Part of the reason for this may be the likelihood of White individuals being more likely to openly identify as being gay (Crawford et al. 2002).

My respondents were all enrolled students at Randall State University, which is a large, public school in a large metropolitan city in the south, with a total enrollment just under 41,000 students. This university has a large proportion of out of state and commuter students. Regarding the environment for LGBT students, Randall State University is consistently ranked among the top schools in the south for LGBT tolerance and acceptance, and recently opened an LGBT Resource Center specifically aimed at serving the needs of the LGBT students on campus. This wide range in geographic location of students hometowns, along with students residing on and off campus is beneficial for recruiting a sample that has varying degrees of exposure to differing demographics, such as individuals with differing sexual orientations.

To recruit respondents, I hung flyers around the Randall State University campus advertising $20 for participation in a study on “men’s friendships”\(^6\). I hung roughly 50 signs all over campus on bus-stops, flyer boards, and window space on campus that had other flyers hanging on them. Over 20 interested straight male participants volunteered for the study in less than two weeks after hanging the flyers.

\(^6\) The flyer advertised an interview centered on men’s friendships. I did not provide information regarding the topic of cross-sexual orientation friendships on the flyer because I believed this could create a selection bias whereby only those who feel passionately about the topic would opt into the study.
To recruit queer participants, I contacted the director of the LGBT Resource center at Randall State University for assistance in gaining access to the LGBT population at Randall State University. Beyond the LGBT Resource center, flyers were placed around campus and sent out to introductory level social science classes. I asked interested participants to complete a preliminary questionnaire asking for their age, race, gender, major, year, and sexual orientation. The purpose of this questionnaire was to make sure that the sample would be diverse in terms of race, but also by year and major.

After the initial screening, respondents were contacted to schedule a time and place to meet. This meeting place, however, was generally consistent throughout the duration of this study, and I most often met respondents in front of a coffee shop in the student center. Upon consenting to participate in the interview, the respondent was given $20 for their willingness for participation. The interviews were semi-structured, which allowed for both the participant and myself to engage in specific topics of cross-sexual orientation friendship as seen fit. Interviews began by discussing participants general attitudes towards what constitutes a friendship, progressed into discussing their friendship groups and the interactions that take place within them, and then moved into discussion surrounding whether they had or would be willing to have a male friend of a different sexual orientation. If respondents noted that they did have a friend of a different sexual orientation, the interview would move into a discussion of the nature of the friendship(s). If respondents noted that they did not have a male friend of a different sexual orientation, discussion would then center on their willingness to enter into these associations, and

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7 Roughly 10-15 straight men were turned away, along with 5 queer men. They were turned away either because one of their demographics (race, class, major, etc.) were overrepresented, or because they made contact with me after my sample had been recruited.
would then progress into understanding what respondents believed these associations would be like.

All interviews were transcribed fully and coded. The coding approach utilized for this study was a dual pass coding strategy (Santana 2011), whereby the first pass through the interview is centered around generating new codes, and the second pass through the data is used to both theoretically connect the existing codes, and to offer new ones where seen fit. After examining the codes that arose in my data, I looked to note if racial differences were playing a role in my findings in terms of whether the masculine hierarchy was more salient in cross-sexual orientation friendships among men of certain racial identities. For instance, prior research indicates that certain racial groups may exhibit greater levels of homophobia than others (Crawford et al. 2002, Ward 2008). However, after observing the same general trends across racial categories, I decided not to break them up by racial categorization. Respondents’ names were replaced with pseudonyms for this study to protect participant confidentiality.  

RESULTS

Two broad themes were central to the operation of cross-sexual orientation friendships: the negotiation of the masculine hierarchy during the formation of these friendships, and the mutual maintenance of this hierarchy once these friendships are formed. To preview the results, I find that masculinity, and the hierarchy that it generates in terms of straight male dominance and queer male inferiority, is central in both the formation (or decision not to enter into) these friendships, and is also central once the friendships have been created. Results suggest that queer men’s subordinate position in the masculine hierarchy is more commonly noticed and understood as being a central aspect in these friendships by queer men as opposed to straight men. In regards

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8 I had received permission to conduct this research from the Rice University Institutional Review Board before conducting any of my research for the present study.
to the formation of these cross-sexual orientation friendships between men, the three most
prominently articulated impediments were queer men’s past experiences dealing with
homophobia, queer men’s fear of having to come out, along with the commonly held belief that
straight men simply have no interest in being friends with a queer man.

A. Hierarchy during the formation of cross-sexual orientation friendships

A1. Experiences with Homophobia

First, queer men’s past experiences with homophobia colored their perception of both the
possibility and quality of future cross-sexual orientation friendships for queer men in the sample.
Queer respondents often detailed their past experiences of homophobia in the form of physical,
verbal, and cyber bullying during junior high and high school. These past experiences of bullying
were, in all but two instances, perpetrated by male peers whom respondents believed to be
straight. To illustrate this pattern, I draw on the narrative of one participant, Rory, age 26,
because his experiences are illustrative of queer respondents past experiences with bullying and
how it permeates into their relationships to this day. Rory recounts experiencing bullying in both
junior high and high school. Rory, in a rather collected, matter-of-fact manner detailed his past
experiences of being bullied because of his perceived sexuality, describing that he was often a
target of harassment:

Rory: Though I wasn’t out, I was, I guess more easy to read than others I would say.

Some people always knew [that I was queer] and I would get bullied sometimes,
mainly name calling. Never anything violent of course. Name calling, being shoved
in the locker, notes on my car, things like that.
Roughly 8 years after this last incident of bullying, Rory describes how these past experiences affect his current interactions with straight men, articulating that they made him more cautious to interact with straight men:

More wary to go ahead and talk to guys, especially straight guys because you don't know what their reactions would be. Just generally thinking, "oh well, obviously because I'm being bullied by straight guys, they're not like those that you would consider friends."

The majority of queer respondents echoed Rory’s sentiments, articulating that past experiences with bullying from straight men in school have made them anxious to enter into any friendships with straight men. In fact, many queer respondents reported that they still feared physical abuse from straight men for disclosing their sexuality. When asked why he is less likely to choose to be friends with straight men, Rory replied:

“… of course stereotypes. I mean, even still today I have stereotypes about jock guys or more of the conservative guys are being less accepting. Stereotypes that from those experiences are now in my mind.”

These previous negative interactions with bullying and homophobia had large influence on the likelihood of queer men in this sample to seek out or engage in these types of friendships, as queer men largely perceived straight men of being more homophobic, and thus, queer men chose to avoid these interactions so as to not experience subsequent homophobia.

A2. Coming Out

A second impediment to the formation of these cross-sexual orientation friendships was queer men’s fear of having to “come out” to straight men. Gay men typically hold a great deal of
anxiety surrounding having to come out to their straight male friends (Ward and Winstanley 2005, Barrett 2013), though disclosing sexual identity often does little to affect the friendship. In the present study, queer men reported typically avoiding entering into new friendships with straight men because they fear the reaction they may receive upon disclosing their sexuality. Queer men in the sample both felt as though their sexuality needed to be disclosed before they could befriend a straight man, and that this disclosure would possibly put both the friendship and themselves at risk. Queer respondents believed that coming out would be something that would completely alter the friendship.

Queer men in the sample felt as though disclosing their sexual identity to straight men would make straight men not want to engage in these friendships. Yet, queer men also articulated that their sexual identity must be disclosed prior to entering into these friendships. Thus, queer men see coming out as both a risk and a necessity in these associations. This tension resulted in a quarter of queer men in my sample articulating that having to come out to a straight man is enough to prevent them from entering into these friendships.

A majority (14 out of 20) of queer respondents largely believed that the danger of coming out would be that their straight male friends would likely feel uncomfortable or threatened by their queer sexual identity. Queer respondents reported believing that straight men would assume that the queer male was attracted to them, thus both ruining the possibility of a friendship, and challenging the straight male’s assumption of heteronormativity.

Although almost all straight men in the sample articulated that they would be perfectly fine if one of their good friends turned out to be queer, many of them reported that it would challenge them, and they thought it would likely challenge other straight men in that situation as well. Umberto, a 20 year old, straight Sophomore, goes into detail regarding how a man whom he was
friends with identifying himself as queer would challenge him. In articulating what he would say to a friend who came out as gay, he responded:

Umberto: You’re straight. That’s what you are, that’s what I believe you are, and I don’t want to know whether you are or not. Because it would challenge me. It would challenge my homophobia. If you turn out to be gay and we’ve been friends for the past 10 years, you’ve been gay all 10 years, and we’ve been close friends and I’ve gone through this and gone through that and you’ve been by my side, and you’re gay. You see, that would deeply challenge us.

This narrative from Umberto illustrates that if one of his friends came out to him, it would challenge his homophobia. It would challenge his taken for granted assumption that all of his friends are straight. The point to be taken from these examples from straight respondents is that they articulate that the fears queer men have surrounding coming out to straight men are not unwarranted. Queer men recognized that disclosing their sexuality to straight men would both challenge their assumptions of heteronormativity, and thus, could challenge the friendship more generally.

It is important to note, however, that for queer men and straight men alike, those men who are actually involved in cross-sexual orientation friendships report little conflict surrounding their coming out experience in these friendships. In fact, some queer respondents noted their friendships getting stronger after coming out. As noted by one respondent, Derek, an 18 year old freshman, explained how disclosing his sexuality impacted his friendships with straight men: “I just felt more peaceful with myself and with the relationship. I think all my relationships improved after I came out.” Thus, from the respondents in my sample, it was the case that having to come out is a barrier to the formation of cross-sexual orientation friendships, but is not
something that they report as having affected the friendships that they had already been involved in.

A3. Presumption that Straight Men Have Little Desire for the Friendships

The third trend that emerged from the interviews regarding the formation of cross-sexual orientation friendships was the commonly held belief by queer men that straight men have little interest in befriending queer men. Queer men in my sample believed that befriending a queer man could be perceived as a loss of social status for straight men. This loss of social status, queer respondents reported, would likely be because befriending queer men would be a threat to straight men’s masculinity. In describing why he believes cross-sexual orientation friendships are less common, Justin, a 31 year old queer senior, said:

I guess, like I said, there is nothing really to gain on both sides. In my view there's nothing ... There is not going to be any beneficial transference, you can say, but there's nothing mutually beneficial between gay men and straight guys having a friendship because ... It might be beneficial to the gay man, but probably not straight guy.

After being asked why engaging in these friendships may only be beneficial to queer men, Justin responded:

Because like I said, the straight guys have the masculinity to protect, and that's also part of their privilege. If they associate with or they make friends with straight guys,

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9 None of the queer respondents in my sample reported having a negative reaction from their straight male friends upon disclosing their sexual identity.
then they kind of lose some of that. It's not that you can lose your masculinity, but just the power that comes with it.

Justin's belief that befriending a queer man would negatively affect a straight man's perceived masculinity, and thus, social status, is something that was commonly articulated among queer respondents. Almost every queer respondent reported that straight men would receive some sort of judgment by other straight men for their associations, highlighting how these beliefs of what it means to be masculine come to be understood by those who do not necessarily meet the qualifications of the masculine ideal. For instance, Trevor, a queer, 18 year old white college Freshman, articulated why he is more wary of entering friendships with straight men:

"just in high school, where I grew up, everyone was kind of like if you're okay with gay people then you're gay. Or something like that."

When asked if he could explain what he meant by gay by association, he articulated that:

"Whenever they (straight men) started to hang out with me, the people that used to hang out with them stopped hanging out with them."

These beliefs held by queer men that associating with a queer man could serve to threaten the perceived social status of straight men, was not echoed by the straight respondents in my sample. In fact, the vast majority of straight men in my sample articulated that they wish they had strong cross-sexual orientation friendships. Supporting prior research (Migliaccio 2009), straight men in the sample report having little intimacy or disclosure in their friendships with other straight men, which the straight respondents reported desiring more of. Straight respondents, however, reported believing that they would likely be able to disclose much more to
a queer man than they would to a straight man. Mike, a 22 year old senior, articulated these sentiments, stating:

I feel like gay men are, just talking about the average and I guess just probably the stereotype that they're more tolerant of I guess what are considered more feminine emotions. They would be more understanding if I would express certain weaknesses or certain emotions.

The interviews with straight men highlighted that these friendships are a site for increased disclosure and intimacy for straight men, who also reported these two aspects as being lacking in their friendships with other straight men. Though it will be discussed in greater detail later, those straight men who are engaged in cross-sexual orientation friendships echoed the sentiment that straight men are generally able to disclose more to their queer male friends than their straight male friends.

Therefore, contrary to the popularly held view by queer men, straight men in my sample did exhibit interest in being in cross-sexual orientation friendships. Straight men understood that they had little to risk in expressing emotion or disclosing their feelings to a queer man, as queer men were posited in a subordinated position on the masculine hierarchy. Thus, though straight men desiring cross-sexual orientation friendships may be indicative of increasing acceptance, in straight men articulating that they do not need to enact masculinity as stringently in associations with queer men, it also indicates that straight men internalize the masculine hierarchy. Further, only one straight male respondent noted that this challenge to their masculinity would affect their engagement in cross-sexual orientation friendships.

B. How the Hierarchy is Negotiated Within These Friendships
B1. *Queer men police themselves in these friendships*

Queer men in my sample described policing themselves, both in their actions and discourse, in these cross-sexual orientation friendships. This was in contrast to their straight male friends, who do not police themselves to the same extent in these associations. Queer respondents consistently described avoiding talking about themselves during certain conversations, as they were under the belief that if they were to disclose too much information regarding their personal life, they would make their straight male friend feel uncomfortable. This non-disclosure most frequently centered around the queer respondents' romantic life, as queer men articulated that they did not believe their friends would have any interest in hearing about their dating and romantic life. As stated by Kevin, a queer respondent,

Kevin: I don't think they'd (straight male friends) be as comfortable as I am listening to theirs. I'm sure they would and they would listen, but I don't know, I don't think they would feel comfortable. They may be curious, they could be curious. They could just be trying to get some information gathering, but I don't think they'd be as receptive.

It was commonly reported, by queer and straight men alike, that it was more socially acceptable for straight men in these friendships to discuss their dating lives when compared to the queer men. Further, both straight and queer men alike also reported that queer men often initiated these conversations about the straight man’s dating life: meaning that the queer man in the friendship would often inquire about the straight man’s intimate life, though this was most often not returned by the straight respondent. A few respondents did note that the straight men in these friendships would inquire about their queer friends’ intimate relationships. In situations where the straight male would ask their queer friend questions regarding their dating or sex life,
however, queer men were less likely to feel comfortable talking to their straight male friend about this topic. Queer men perceived this as a topic which would likely make the straight male uncomfortable, and would engage in self-censorship, even when the straight male friend would do their best to create a space for their queer friend to feel comfortable disclosing this information. Rocco, a straight 18-year old Hispanic freshman, acknowledged that his queer friend will often ask questions regarding his romantic life, and ask the men in his social circle questions about their relationships. Rocco reports that his queer friend, however, discloses far less about his own romantic life:

   Rocco: Usually he won't talk about guys, or we won't talk about guys or his sexual preference when we're hanging out.

   Interviewer: Do you think that would be weird?

   Rocco: It wouldn't be weird, but he just ... he just doesn't like to talk about it with us.

This resistance to talking about dating or sex for queer respondents, and the ability for the straight men to talk openly about their dating and sex life in these friendships points to a larger issue: the recognition by queer men that the romantic life of straight men is deemed to be more conventional than the romantic life of the queer men and thus, acceptable for all to discuss. Queer men policing their discourse in these friendships points towards a distinct recognition of the hierarchy that masculinity generates. Straight men in these friendships have the privilege of talking about their intimate lives without the expectation that it may make the queer respondents feel uncomfortable, but queer men are constantly policing themselves and regulating their words so as to not discuss topics which may make their straight male friends feel uncomfortable.
B2. *Queer men put more work into maintaining these friendships*

Through the course of the interviews, it became apparent that queer men in this sample had some degree of anxiety surrounding the maintenance of these friendships. The anxiety expressed revolved around queer men believing that their straight friends had little to gain from the association. Justin, a queer white senior, articulated that some of his anxiety stems from the fact that he believes he doesn’t see anything beneficial in the association for straight man:

Justin: I guess, like I said, there is nothing really to gain on both sides. In my view there's nothing ... There is not going to be any beneficial transference, you can say, but there's nothing mutually beneficial between gay men and straight guys having a friendship because ... It might be beneficial to the gay man, but probably not straight guy.

Interviewer: Why?

Justin: Because like I said, the straight guys have the masculinity to protect, and that's also part of their privilege. If they associate with or they make friends with gay guys, then they kind of lose some of that. It's not that you can lose your masculinity, but just the power that comes with it.

Justin, like many queer respondents, held the belief that a straight man befriending a queer man would be seen as a threat to the masculinity of the straight man who enters the association. Therefore, there was little incentive seen for straight men to want to engage in a friendship with a queer man.

As such, queer men and straight men alike reported that the queer friend was often the one in the friendship that put in more work to keep the conversations going, and would often do
so by asking the straight men questions that allowed the straight man to talk about either his own life, or things that interested him. This aligns with the idea of emotion work and management, where subordinated groups (i.e. women or sexual minorities), feel as though they have to put in more work to sustain the friendship Hochshild 2003; queer men felt as though there was nothing to gain in this association for the straight men.

Queer men did not explicitly state why they put more work into these friendships than their straight friends, but did articulate that they had anxiety about losing these associations because straight men would end the associations, which may have caused the queer men to put in more work to sustain them. Further, the conversations that they would engage their straight friends in were almost always conversations that revolved around the straight man, often asking questions regarding their own life or interests.

Queer men articulated that straight men ran the risk of losing some masculine privilege, and thus, social status. This perceived loss of social status for the straight man both generates anxiety for the queer man regarding the future of the friendship, and motivates the queer man to put more emotion work into the friendship than the straight man would. 10

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Men's cross-sexual orientation friendships serve as a theoretically useful site in understanding gender dynamics. Given the subordinated position of queer men, and the privileged position of straight men in the masculine hierarchy, cross-sexual orientation

10 It should be noted though that the queer men in this sample expressed no frustration with being the ones in the friendship that put in more work. Queer men repeatedly reported great satisfaction in their cross-sexual orientation friendships. The queer men in the friendships were engaging in the privileging of the masculine hierarchy themselves, regardless of whether or not their straight male friends did.
friendships allow for a fuller examination of how this gendered hierarchy operates in even the most egalitarian, reciprocal and voluntary of associations. This study found strong support for masculinity being highly influential in both the formation and maintenance of cross-sexual orientation friendships between men. The masculine hierarchy is upheld during the formation and continuation of these friendships. This hierarchy was reproduced through the formation of these friendships through three distinct avenues. First, past experiences of homophobia were found to impact the beliefs that queer men had regarding straight men. Past research has articulated that boys in middle and high school often enact masculinity through homophobic rhetoric (Pascoe 2011). The present study finds evidence to support that these experiences either with homophobia or overhearing homophobic discourse in high school often leads queer men to believe that straight men are too homophobic to hold a sustainable friendship with them. Second, stemming from this belief that straight men are generally homophobic, there arises a great deal anxiety for queer men surrounding having to "come out," or disclose their sexual identity to their straight male friend. The thought of a straight male reacting in a negative manner to their sexual identity was consistently referred to as a chief anxiety queer men had regarding the formation of these friendships with straight men. Third, building off of this anxiety was queer men’s belief that straight men had very little desire to enter into a friendship with queer men. Queer men believed that a straight man befriending a queer man would be perceived as a risk to the straight man’s masculinity, and would thus result in a loss of social status for the straight man that befriends a queer man. This, however, was not articulated by straight men in the sample, as straight men perceived that cross-sexual orientation friendships would likely offer greater disclosure and intimacy than a friendship with another straight male would. Thus, the masculine hierarchy appears to be something that is internalized by straight men, but that is what makes
these friendships desirable. Straight men understand that there is less at risk in disclosing their feelings to a queer man, since they are in a subordinated position on the masculine hierarchy. Thus, through the formation of these friendships, the masculine hierarchy is being reinscribed, as queer men are devoting far more time, energy and anxiety in trying to form these friendships. Further, this awareness of a masculine hierarchy was one that was solely exhibited and articulated by the queer men in the sample as being a tension within these friendships. Straight men in this sample found this differential in positioning on the masculine hierarchy to be a benefit.

The masculine hierarchy is also mutually upheld within cross-sexual orientation friendships after they have been formed through a variety of processes. First, queer men felt the need to disclose far less in these friendships, especially in regard to their romantic lives. This lack of disclosure by queer men was due, in large part, to queer respondent’s belief that in order to maintain these cross-sexual orientation friendships they must not make their straight male friends uncomfortable, which includes not talking about their romantic lives. Second, queer men do more emotion work to maintain these friendships with straight men, as queer men articulated that they were the ones in these friendships fishing for conversation or asking their straight male friends questions about their life. Queer respondents expressed an anxiety that they would lose these friendships and thus, felt as though they had to do more work to keep these friendships. Queer men felt as though they had to do more work because they largely believed that these friendships were potentially harmful to the identity of the straight men. Thus, queer men felt as though they had to compensate for a perceived loss of masculinity for the straight men by not only being the ones to keep conversation moving, but also by centering conversation around the straight man.
Queer men spend substantially more energy concerning themselves with potential threats to the masculinity of their straight male friends than straight men seemed to do. Straight men articulated few restrictions in regard to what they can or should talk about in these friendships, whereas queer men are consistently policing themselves. This is a reinforcement of privilege: taking into account the privileged persons wants and needs without the expectation of it being reciprocated is part of the way that hierarchies are maintained (Hochschild 2003). Further, there is no negotiation of the masculine hierarchy by the straight men in these friendships--they lose little and gain a source of disclosure. Queer men negotiate this hierarchy in many ways--less disclosure, policing of actions, avoiding topics of conversation all together, going out of their way to protect the masculine identity of the straight men. Though this hierarchy may be less understood by those that occupy a privileged position in these relationships (i.e. straight men), both straight and queer men reinforce and construct this masculine hierarchy through the formation and maintenance of these friendships.¹¹

The main limitation of this study is that these results may not be generalizable to the larger population. Though theoretically useful, the present study analyzes a very specific population: college-aged men who attend a large public university in the South. Therefore, this study does not seek to generalize these findings to all men, or to all cross-sexual orientation friendships. Rather, it is possible that the findings from this study are unique to the specific population that was chosen for this study.

Further, the present study does not actually observe men’s cross sexual-orientation friendships. This study only is able to examine how men talk about and understanding their

¹¹ It is important to note, however, that this hierarchy in these cross-sexual orientation friendships is may be predicated upon the norms of the environment. For example, this hierarchy may be reversed in spaces deemed to be more feminine, such as those friendships that were formed through participation in music or theatre. In describing these spaces, queer men reported not policing their discourse or their action at all.
cross-sexual orientation friendships. Future studies should take up the project of observing cross-sexual orientation friendships, and understanding if the processes articulated in this study play out in interactions in these friendships.

Future research would also benefit from a more thorough investigation of the difference between public and private interactions in cross-sexual orientation friendships. Queer respondents noted that interactions with their straight friends were often quite different in public places, both in regard to level of disclosure, and also in regard to the enactment of heightened masculinity. The spaces in which this took place, however, were not examined in this study, but an examination of this could likely highlight both the contexts in which an individual’s sexual identity is most salient, and the contexts through which an individual’s sexual identity most challenges those around them. This study would help to show the role of space and group in related to performances of masculinity.
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