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Negotiating Dominant Masculinity Ideology: Strategies Used by Gay, Bisexual and Questioning Male Adolescents

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Abstract

In the context of a U.S. dominant masculinity ideology, which devalues men who are not heterosexually identified, many gay, bisexual and questioning (GBQ) adolescent males must develop their own affirming and health-promoting sense of masculinity. In order to promote the well-being of GBQ young men, exploration of their reactions and responses to dominant images of masculinity is needed. We qualitatively analyzed interviews with 39 GBQ African American, Latino, and European American male adolescents (15–23 years old). Participants reported a range of responses to traditional masculinity ideologies, most of which centered on balancing presentations of masculine and feminine characteristics. Negotiation strategies served a variety of functions, including avoiding anti-gay violence, living up to expected images of masculinity, and creating unique images of personhood free of gender role expectations. These data suggest a complex picture of GBQ male adolescents' management of masculinity expectations and serve as a basis for culturally and developmentally specific HIV prevention programs.

Keywords

gay; masculinity; identity; adolescents; sexuality; HIV

INTRODUCTION

“I just think, I just think that they're [messages about being a man] a standard, they're just things that we were raised up with and we just have to fight them. We don't have to live with them.” (Gilbert, 17 yr. old Latino bisexual male)

This quote from a study participant reflects the tenuous position through which many young gay, bisexual, and questioning (GBQ) males must navigate. With constant challenges to their claims of authentic maleness due to their sexual orientation, they struggle to simultaneously develop strategies to negotiate dominant messages about masculinity that are difficult to change while also asserting a sense of self that resists those dominant messages. It is in the context of a dominant masculinity ideology, which opposes or devalues non-heterosexually identified men, that many young GBQ males must develop resilience and wellness. Facilitating overall wellness and health through interventions and community action among GBQ male adolescents requires an examination of the responses of these

young men to the dominant images of masculinity, as gender and gender expression have been identified as core contextual constructs that impact health promotion efforts (Courtenay, 2000), particularly HIV prevention (Diaz, 1998; DiClemente & Wingood, 1995). This paper describes a qualitative investigation of how a sample of African American, Latino and European American GBQ male adolescents construct masculinity and the strategies they use to navigate their own and society's masculinity ideologies.

Background

Young men who have sex with men are considered to be at high risk for HIV infection because the largest proportion of males between the ages of 13–24 living with HIV and AIDS contracted the virus through male-to-male transmission (CDC, 2006; Garofalo & Harper, 2003). Rates of HIV infection among this group are increasing at alarming rates (MacKellar et al., 2005; Wolitski, Valdiserri, Denning, & Levine, 2001). Interventions to reduce HIV risk that are specifically targeted for sexual minority male youth are urgently needed (Harper, 2007; Kelly, 2000), and as with HIV prevention programs in general, it is advised that these interventions be culturally and contextually grounded (Harper, Contreras, Bangi, & Pedraza, 2003; Parker, 2001; Wilson & Miller, 2003). Yet, the few HIV prevention programs that have been developed for GBQ youth often do not address core contextual and cultural factors, such as how individuals' identities and socialization related to their ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation impact sexual behavior (Harper, 2007). This is due in part to the lack of research on identity and culture among GBQ youth.

The current investigation is drawn from a larger study entitled MOSAIC; its name is a metaphor for the variety of identities that young GBQ youth must negotiate. MOSAIC was designed to address the lack of action research on ethnic, gender, and sexual identity development and expression among young GBQ males in order to inform the development of ecologically valid HIV prevention programs for this population. The current paper focuses primarily on one domain of adolescent identity--masculine gender-- and its meaning in the lives of young GBQ males.

Previous Research

While young men may identify themselves as male because of their physical/biological sex characteristics or may be classified as male because of others' assumption that they are biologically male, the manners in which they "do" or perform their masculine gender identity is a function of their day-to-day interpersonal interactions and the institutions and systems in which they live (West & Zimmerman, 1987). A core component of the institutional context in which young men develop their understandings and expressions of gender, as well as their understanding of the societal rules for gender expression among males, is masculinity ideology. Masculinity ideology refers to the traditional and socially constructed definition of masculinity at a given time in history and culture (Thompson & Pleck, 1995); it is a product of the internalization of messages about the cultural norms and expectations regarding appropriate male behavior (Abreu, Goodyear, Campos, & Newcomb, 2000). As a framework for expectations of appropriate male behavior, masculinity ideology also influences how men conceptualize their sexuality, including sexual identities and sexual behavior (Stokes, Miller, & Mundhenk, 1998). The current hegemonic masculinity ideology, also referred to as traditional masculinity ideology, is described in the U.S. as having some or all of the following perspectives on manhood: man as breadwinner and responsible head of household (Abreu, Goodyear, Campos, & Newcomb, 2000; Pleck, 1987); man as anti-feminine, including the concealing of emotions (Abreu et al., 2000); man as heterosexual, with heterosexuality as the normative sexual orientation (Connell, 1995); man as homophobic, with acts of homoantagonism and feelings of homophobia as normative (Buchbinder, 1994; Herek, 1986; Kimmel, 1995); man as a person with high status and

confidence (Thompson & Pleck, 1986); and man as violently tough and physically strong (Thompson & Pleck, 1986).

The majority of research on U.S. masculinity has focused primarily on the experiences of Euro-American men. While this is problematic in that it has led to a subsequent re-affirmation of masculinity as a monolithic experience shared by all men, the literature is not conclusive on the extent to or ways in which the adoption of masculine ideologies truly varies between sub-ethnic groups within U.S. culture (see, e.g., Abreu et al., 2000 for a review). Nonetheless, with heterosexuality as a rooting feature of hegemonic masculinity in many ethnic communities in the U.S. (see, e.g., Herek, 2002; Herek, & Capitano, 1995; Herek & Gonzales-Rivera, 2006), dominant conceptualizations of masculinity and maleness typically render the gay or bisexual man within any ethnic group as “not man enough.” Young GBQ men are then confronted with the need to negotiate conflicting cultural and personal beliefs about the relationship between their sexual identity and masculine gender identity.

Research has illustrated that while all men are exposed to dominant masculinity ideologies, there is great diversity in how people respond to these cultural messages (Connell, 1995; Courtenay, 2000). Some scholars have suggested that because sexual minority men can never fully attain the dominant masculine image due to their non-heterosexuality, they engage in behaviors that undermine or resist hegemonic masculinities, such as HIV-risk behavior (Connell, 1995; Courtenay, 1995). Similar to categorizations that note levels of assimilation and resistance to dominant ideologies, another approach to studying responses to hegemonic masculinities has been the identification of multiple typologies of masculine expression. Examples of such typologies include the “straight sissy boy,” “committed straight queer,” and “social justice straight queer” typologies identified in Heasley’s (2005) study of masculinity expression among heterosexual men that did not conform to the dominant masculinity ideology, where the term queer was used for all men with gender non-conforming expression. Distinguishing between multiple forms of resistance would be useful to applied masculinity researchers, yet the small body of literature on sexual minority men’s masculinity has been relatively theoretical and has not documented how samples of men enact these distinctions. As Wetherell and Edley (1999) suggest:

What is missing is more fine-grain work on what complicity and resistance look like in practice. Investigations are required into how men negotiate regulatory conceptions of masculinity in their everyday interactions as they account for their actions and produce or manage their own (and others’) identities. (p. 337)

Pascoe (2003), in his study of heterosexual masculinity, has also called for an examination of masculinity that illuminates the details and complexities in how young men negotiate masculinity, not just the categorization of masculinity typologies that are oft times found in the literature (e.g., jock, player, effeminate).

To date, relatively few studies have specifically sought to examine how gay or bisexual males negotiate hegemonic masculinity, and even fewer still have focused on adolescent and young adult males. Among the empirical work that has identified discrete negotiating strategies specific to gay men in the U.S., research suggests that in response to dominant masculinity ideologies, some gay men over-compensate by enacting the more accessible aspects of masculinity, such as having multiple sexual partners (Diaz, 1998; Levine, 1998; Wolfe, 2003), working to increase muscularity through exercise/weight training (Kimmel & Mahalik, 2005), or adopting physically dominating behaviors, like sports (Fellows, 1996). Though informative, generalizing the findings of these studies, which focused on adult gay and bisexual men, to the experiences of adolescent GBQ males may be problematic. From a developmental perspective, findings related to masculinity/sexual identity negotiation

strategies of adult gay men cannot be extrapolated to the life experiences of GBQ male adolescents, given that these youth are engaged in an exploration and consolidation of a unique and mature personal identity.

The formation of an individual identity is considered by many theorists to be the primary developmental goal of adolescence (Adams, Gullotta, & Montemayor, 1992; Erikson, 1968). For many sexual minority youth, the individual identity formation process can be complicated by experiences of heterosexism and prejudice since their exploration of sexual identity typically involves physical and verbal expressions of same-gender sexual attraction and behavior—actions which are still stigmatized in society (Ryan & Futterman, 1998; Harper & Schneider, 2003). Thus, sexual minority youth must juggle the “normal” developmental difficulties faced by all youth, but do so within a societal framework characterized by pervasive homophobia and heterosexism. The experiences of sexual minority youth of color are further complicated by experiences with racial prejudice in society at large and within the larger predominately European American mainstream gay community, limited economic opportunities and resources as a consequence of racism, and limited acceptance of their sexuality within their own ethnic cultural community (Diaz, 1998; Harper, Jernewall, & Zea, 2004; Martinez & Sullivan, 1998; McCready, 2004).

Another factor that makes it difficult to extrapolate masculinity/sexuality identity findings from adult gay men to adolescents is that GBQ youth are typically active participants in at least two other social systems that may influence interpretations and expressions of masculinity—namely the family (especially interactions with parents) and the school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; D’Augelli, 2005). While these two institutions generally provide heterosexual male youth with support and guidance for the development of a personal identity, GBQ male youth often find that family, peers, and teachers do not accept, support, and/or nurture their developing GBQ sexual identity (D’Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Pilkington & D’Augelli, 1995; Savin-Williams, 1995; Telljohan & Price, 1993). And although adult sexual minority men are likely influenced by their education and family systems, the control of these institutions over the current masculinity ideology negotiation behaviors of adolescents is likely greater than it is for adults. Illustratively, acts of verbal harassment and physical violence perpetrated by boys and adolescents toward other male peers at school are often associated with hegemonic masculinity values (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Stoudt, 2006). The negative verbal actions of peers can be particularly damaging to GBQ male adolescents, especially when derogatory terms like “fag” are used in social interactions (Plummer, 2001). Many male adolescents achieve their masculinity through the denial or repudiation of a “fag” identity (Pascoe, 2005; Phoenix, Frosh, & Pattman, 2003), which further complicates the developing GBQ male adolescent’s integration of his sexual and masculine identities.

Given these developmental factors and adolescent-specific contexts, it is important that we understand how GBQ young men negotiate and manage pressures to conform to dominant masculinity ideologies. The empirical research on issues of masculinity among GBQ male adolescents and young adults is sparse, and we were able to find very few empirical studies that have systematically examined the negotiation of traditional and hegemonic masculinity among these youth (e.g., Davidson, 2006; Drummond, 2005a, 2005b). Similar to the findings of Kimmel and Mahalik (2005) in their study of U.S. adult men, some young men in Australia alter their bodies to increase muscularity as a means of establishing a masculine image (Drummond, 2005a, 2005b). In the U.S., a case study of one 18 years old Latino bisexual male demonstrated that a potential strategy may be to negotiate masculinity ideologies by reconceptualizing appropriate male behavior to include a fluid balance of characteristics that are viewed as feminine and masculine (Davidson, 2006). These studies provide insight into possible strategies that young GBQ men may use to negotiate dominant

masculinity ideologies in the U.S. However, more research is needed within a U.S. cultural context that specifically focuses on young GBQ males. The current paper is a useful next step in this area of study. The aim of the current study was to explicate how a sample of GBQ young men conceptualized, strategized and negotiated masculinity for the purpose of assisting in the development of a contextually grounded knowledge base for sexual health promotion interventions geared toward GBQ male adolescents.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 39 African American (n=12), Latino (n=14), and European American (n=13) male adolescents who identified as gay (n=30), bisexual (n=8), or questioning (n=1) who participated in both quantitative and qualitative phases of the study. Ages of participants ranged from 15 to 23 years¹ ($M = 19.13$ years, $SD = 2.05$). Educational attainment was distributed across four levels: at least 8th grade (38.5%); high-school graduate/GED (18%); some college/technical school (38.5%); and, college graduate (5%). More than half (64%) of the participants were enrolled as full-time students at the time of the interview. At the time of the initial survey, 23% of participants reported that they had been kicked out of or asked to leave their home at some point in the past for having sex with or being attracted to men and 8% reported having spent the night without housing at least once in their lifetime. In terms of current living arrangements, 69% lived in the home of parents or relatives, 5% lived on the streets or in a boarding house, 3% lived at the home of a friend or boyfriend, and 18% reported living in their own apartment. Roughly 5% of participants indicated other living arrangements, such as university housing.

Procedure

Data for this paper were taken from a parent project which was a two-city, multiphase, mixed-methods study designed to explore the relationship between HIV risk behaviors and ethnic, sexual, and masculine gender identity development among 14–22 year old GBQ African American, Latino, and European American male adolescents. The name of the parent study, MOSAIC, was chosen to represent the project's examination of multiple aspects of adolescent identity. The name MOSAIC was a metaphorical reference that reflected the complexity of our participants' lives in that their self-concepts, composed of co-developing masculine, ethnic and sexual identities, were figuratively similar to the composition of a multifaceted and intricately detailed tile mosaic. Due to significantly higher rates of HIV transmission among African American, Latino, and European American young men in the United States as compared to young men of other ethnic groups, MOSAIC targeted these ethnic communities as a starting point in the development of culturally-specific HIV prevention programs for GBQ male youth. Because adolescence is a critical time of transition during which multiple layers of identity are developed, MOSAIC targeted youth within middle to late adolescence, 15–23 years.

The qualitative interviews for the present study were conducted in the Chicago metropolitan area. European Americans, African Americans, and Latinos are the three largest ethnic groups in Chicago, comprising 42%, 37%, and 26% of the population, respectively (U.S. Census, 2006). Despite its diversity, Chicago is a highly segregated city, with the majority of its residents residing in parts of the city that are ethnically monolithic. African American and Latino populations primarily live on the South and West sides of the city, while European Americans are more likely to live on the North side, including surrounding

¹The age range for participation in the initial quantitative phase of the study was 14–22 years old. Two participants reached the age of 23 years by the time they participated in the in-depth interview which was conducted after the quantitative survey phase.

northern suburbs, and in the Central, Downtown area. Chicago's gay community and major gay and bisexual youth services are centered in the heart of the city's North side, in a largely middle- and upper-class, European American area far from the neighborhoods in which most of the city's African American and Latino populations live.

The data collection for this study had two primary phases. First, participants were recruited through community agencies to participate in a brief screening interview and then, if eligible, complete a self-administered quantitative questionnaire. The questionnaire had several sections, including demographic factors (e.g., age, education, living arrangements), sexual behaviors and substance use, ethnic identity, gay identity and identification with the gay community. To be eligible for the questionnaire, participants needed to: (1) report that they were a biological male and currently identify as male; (2) be at least 14 and no more than 22 years of age, (3) identify as gay, bisexual or questioning, (4) identify as African American, Latino or European American, (5) live in the Chicago metropolitan area, and (6) have not tested positive for HIV (this was due to the larger study's focus on primary prevention). Questionnaires were administered in private locations at either one of the community agencies or the sponsoring university after obtaining informed consent or assent². The information obtained from this brief questionnaire was then used to create the sampling frame for the next phase of the study, in-depth qualitative interviews. The sampling frame was stratified by 3 age groups to account for developmental and sociocultural stages related to entry into middle/late adolescence and legal entry into bar culture (15–17, 18–20, 21–22), ethnicity (African American, Latino, and European American) and level of gay identification (higher and lower). Two valid and reliable measures included in the MOSAIC questionnaire, the *Gay Identity Questionnaire* (Brady & Busse, 1994) and the *Identification and Involvement with the Gay Community Scale* (Venable, McKirnan, & Stokes, 1995), were used to stratify youth by level of gay identification. Both measures were used since youth who are developing their sexual identity may reveal exploration and acceptance of their gay identity through both cognitive processes (traditional measures of gay identity) and social/experiential activities (participation in and connection to the gay community). The in-depth qualitative interview took approximately two hours. Respondents were compensated \$35 for participating in the interview. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim by an independent professional transcriptionist. Transcripts were checked for accuracy by a research team member who listened to each tape while reading the transcription text and making edits where appropriate. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Boards of DePaul University and the funding agency, the Adolescent Medicine Trials Network for HIV/AIDS Interventions (ATN).

Interview Protocol—The in-depth interview explored several issues that young GBQ males experience, such as challenges to developing various identities (i.e., ethnic, sexual, gender), exploration with sexual behaviors and drug use, and community involvement. We used a semi-structured interview format because we aimed to inductively explore how young GBQ males think about core areas of identity and behavior relevant to HIV prevention, but also wanted to structure the interview enough to make information translatable to community-wide health promotion development efforts. After using the initial protocol for 23 interviews, we conducted 7 validating interviews with adult key informants ($n = 3$) and youth ($n = 4$) who had previously completed a survey but not an in-depth interview. The purpose of conducting validating interviews near the midpoint of data collection was to ascertain quality, content, and ecological validity of the qualitative data

²Assent was obtained from minors because we obtained a waiver of parental consent through the DePaul University Institutional Review Board.

collected thus far. The adult key informants were males and females who were particularly knowledgeable about the issues facing GBQ young men through their work in local agencies and health centers that provided services to this community. Information from the validating interviews was used to modify the interview protocol before the final 16 in-depth interviews were completed. In addition to improvements in the wording of questions, the revised protocol included new sections identified as important by key informants, such as sex for trade and Internet communities.

With regard to identity development, the interview explored four aspects of GBQ male youths' identities: male/masculine identity, ethnic identity, sexual identity, and integrated identity. For the masculine, ethnic, and sexual identity sections, participants were first asked to describe their conceptualization of an identity domain. For example, participants were asked if there were specific roles or responsibilities particular to that identity. Participants were also asked if they heard any messages about what it meant to be a person with a particular masculine/ethnic/sexual identity. Examples of questions from the masculine gender identity section are: "What messages do you get about being a man or what it takes to be a man?;" and "You have just told me about messages you get about what it means to be a man and how men are supposed to act. How do you fit into this?" The general process within each interview was to first determine what messages they heard about each identity domain, then ask the respondent whether they agreed or disagreed with the messages or roles. Then, we assessed whether they felt that they "fit" with the messages they heard about each identity domain. After determining their perception of "fit," participants were asked to describe ways in which they felt they did or did not conform to the described identity. Based on feedback from the validation process, we revised the interview protocol to include a question about how they felt about the extent to which they fit with common messages about each identity domain. Finally, the interview protocol included sections that explored recent sexual activity and condom use, and a final artistic component that provided participants an opportunity to represent the ways they integrated their multiple identities through a drawing exercise.

Analyses

We primarily used an inductive analysis procedure to allow the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis to emerge from the fully transcribed interview data (Patton, 1990). This procedure allows for an exploration of indigenous concepts. However, we also employed aspects of deductive coding that acknowledged our familiarity with the existing literature on traditional notions of masculinity and gay male masculinities by examining the data for evidence of these themes. Specifically, the literature suggested that an important contribution to studies of adolescent masculinities would be an exploration of how young men negotiate masculinity in their day-to-day lives (Pascoe, 2003; Wetherell & Edley, 1999), and therefore we analyzed the data for strategies the young men used to negotiate their masculine identity. Guiding research questions in the analytic process were: how do GBQ male adolescents think about masculinity?; how do they negotiate the messages they hear about what it means to be a male person?; and what other aspects of dominant masculinity ideology besides heterosexual superiority define the tensions that GBQ young males face?

Our approach was phenomenological in nature (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 1990) since we were seeking to learn about the lived experiences of GBQ male adolescents with regard to messages about masculinity, and the ways in which they have navigated hegemonic masculinity ideology. Our focus was on individual and shared experiences and meanings given to those experiences. This is similar to the narrative qualitative approaches used in community psychology by Mankowski and Rappaport (1995, 2000), whereby "stories" are viewed as individual personal accounts of lived experiences, and "narratives" are common

stories or experiences shared across individuals. Given our phenomenological/narrative approach, in the following section of the paper we offer segments of the individual stories from the youth, and present them clustered together into categories of common narratives or shared experiences.

The analysis process occurred in multiple phases. First, all authors read through the interviews to gain greater familiarity with the data. Then, a subset of interviews were assigned to each author who coded the transcripts and created an analysis table documenting each participant's age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, all themes regarding masculinity that emerged in response to any question in the interview protocol, and other pertinent notes about their lives and/or contexts. The first three authors examined the data matrix for all interviews and identified cases in which additional data from interview transcripts were needed. After examining themes in each individual interview, we conducted cross-case and comparative analyses. To do this, we identified consistent patterns in meaning, concepts, and themes across the 39 interviews (cross-case) and then examined comparative differences between various subgroups of participants (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994) with regard to ethnicity. The first author created a suggested thematic structure, and the first three authors discussed the evidence for this structure until a consensus was reached on the final set of themes presented in this manuscript.

One of the major strengths and tenets of practice in qualitative research is the representation of different voices, making sure the "outliers" are not silenced by the average or dominant perspective (Creswell, 1998). As such, we have presented all themes categorized under the major organizing construct of "Negotiating Masculinity," and refrained from limiting the presentation of themes to only those that were endorsed by a majority percentage of participants. We used characteristic quotes in the following section to illustrate the concepts and themes that were revealed. We changed all names in this paper to protect the confidentiality of the respondents and their friends and partners.

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The goal of this paper was to delineate the messages young GBQ men receive about masculinity and manhood and to examine the strategies they use to negotiate their masculine identity. The findings and interpretations section is divided into two main parts. The first section is relatively descriptive and is intended to lay the foundation for the second section by briefly detailing the messages participants reported hearing about masculinity. In this section, we also highlight the sources of these messages and discuss the role of ethnicity in conceptualizing masculinity. The second section provides a contextualized thematic analysis of the ways participants discussed cognitively and behaviorally negotiating masculinity in their lives.

Learning Masculinity

To gain an understanding of what messages GBQ male youth receive about masculinity and manhood, we asked participants about the messages they heard about what it takes to be a man. All participants indicated that they had been exposed to messages congruent with U.S. hegemonic masculinity ideology. For decades, the dominant cultural image of masculinity has included heterosexuality, physical strength, athleticism, control over situations, family caretaking as the head of the household, financial success, and/or not crying or showing emotion (Abreu et al., 2000; Connell, 1995; Pleck, 1987). Many participants reported primarily male family members, peers, and media as the sources for these types of messages. One example of a participant's response that indicated exposure to messages reflective of the dominant masculinity ideology is:

(Participant) ...you had to kind of associate yourselves with sports and stuff like that, because you were a guy. So you must like sports... And my brothers, between my brothers and my father, what they practically burned into my head is that men don't cry and men don't do this. So practically because of them, now I find it really difficult for me to cry. (Sam, Latino, 18 yrs. old, Gay)

In addition to the characteristics of traditional masculinity discussed by Sam, such as athleticism and non-emotionality, participants also indicated that beliefs about the normalcy of heterosexuality were core to the traditional image of a man. For example,

(Participant) What it takes to be a man. I see a different perspective than what everybody else say. Because they feel homosexuals are not considered to be men, because you sleep with another man. That's not part of a manhood. (Robert, African American, 22 yrs. old, Gay)

As the passage from Robert's interview suggests, the message that males are not full men if they have sex with other men is seen as imposed and encouraged. Related to connections made by interviewees regarding sexuality and masculinity, study participants also reported hearing messages that men are expected to be highly sexualized, avoid emotional attachment in sexual relationships, and take a conquest perspective toward sex with women and sometimes men. For example,

(Interviewer) What types of things do you hear [about how men are expected to think or act around sex]?

(Participant) It's like a man's supposed to be on top, he's supposed to be dominant...Or men are not supposed to have any emotions retaining to sex or men don't make love. (Rafael, African American, 22 yrs. old, Gay)

In addition to pointing out the expectation that males should not want emotional attachment to lovers, other participants indicated that the expectations of men's views on sex span across men of various sexual orientations. The above excerpt highlights the social expectation that men are expected to seek sex without emotional connection, a theme present in previous studies of male sexuality (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1995). However, Rafael also indicates that the message "men don't make love" is related to the expectation of dominance and being "on top." Though we did not identify many participants who discussed the need for masculine gay men to be the "top" or the insertive partner during anal sex, a few did indicate that in their own sexual experiences these sexual roles, "tops" and "bottoms", existed and were gendered to the extent that "tops" were expected to be more masculine acting. Similarly, studies of adult gay men have also illustrated the adoption of labels that are derived from a man's role in sexual situations that suggest low to high levels of masculinity, respectively, where the anal receptive partner is labeled the "bottom" and the insertive anal sex partner is labeled the "top" (Bailey, Kim, Hills, & Linsenmeier, 1997; Wegesin & Meyer-Bahlburg, 2000).

Sam, Robert, and Rafael's quotes above highlight external messages about traditional views of masculinity heard by young GBQ males, but without strong force or pressure. Some participants talked about experiencing high degrees of explicit pressure, verbal and physical, to conform to various aspects of the traditional image of manhood. For example, one participant, John, indicated that he was confronted by peers when he exhibited gender non-conforming preferences for toys:

(Participant) ... I was in second grade, and we had Show and Tell...one of my friends was a girl who brought this Barbie. And she was like, 'oh, Superstar Barbie', she had big gold earrings. It was hot! And I was like, 'I got that Barbie at home!' And I said it so loud, I didn't think it was a problem. And all the boys in the

class were like, 'what? You got that Barbie?' And they were like, 'you mean your sister?' And I was like, 'no, it's mine' ...So that kind of put things in perspective like oh, so a boy's not supposed to play with dolls, because of that incident in school. (John, African American, 17 yrs. old, Bisexual)

This incident for John was meaningful as he experienced verbal pressure that cued him to see that he did not fit the image of masculinity with regard to toy preferences. Previous research has also demonstrated the tendency for peers to punish males for transgressing rules for gender-typed toy play, such as young boys who play with dolls and dollhouses (Langlois & Downey, 1980).

Another example of forceful pressure to fit into the dominant concept of masculinity was in the domain of emotional expression. Young GBQ men not only reported awareness that, as men, they were expected to not cry, but some participants also reported being laughed at and yelled at for crying. For example:

(Participant) I rolled off the bed and I went completely off the bed and hit my head and I started bleeding and crying. And he [father] would just add insult to injury... he would just yell at me for crying or for hurting myself, like how could you do that? Don't cry now. Don't cry. Stop crying! (Christian, Latino, 19 yrs. old, Gay)

In the above quotes, participants explicitly indicated being pressured, or harassed, by others in order to fit with the traditional notion that men do not cry. This reported harassment is similar to that reported by adolescent males in other studies where gender non-conforming behavior, regardless of actual sexual orientation, is punished verbally or physically (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Pascoe, 2003).

Ethnic Culture, Class and Masculinity—Although connections between ethnicity, culture, class and masculinity were not often made by participants, a few participants linked ethnic identity and/or class to what they learned about masculinity, a connection found elsewhere in the literature (Connell, 1995; Diaz, 1998). We identified two ways in which ethnicity and gender interacted and influenced how young GBQ men experienced messages about masculinity. We labeled these interactions *culturalizing gender* and *gendering race and ethnicity*.

Culturalizing Gender: For several participants who identified ethnically with a Latino subgroup (e.g., Mexican), the messages they heard while growing up about gender were specific to what it means to be a woman or man within their ethnic group. We are conceptualizing this construction of masculinity in an ethnically or culturally specific framework as *culturalizing gender*. In one example, Jimmy, who identified as gay but still discussed his attraction to women in the interview, talks both about the Mexican culturally-based expectations for men and women and about images of the Mexican man:

(Participant) ...Like in Mexico and like even here it's like the roles are really defined. You're a man, you do this, you get a job, period. You're a woman, you do this, period. No matter what. You know what I'm saying? But when you're gay, it's complicated because you can't be the man because you're not, you don't fit that stereotype of a Mexican man. I don't fit the stereotype of a Mexican man...the stereotype of a Mexican man who is my age who lives in Chicago is really someone who goes and who probably is involved in drugs, who probably does this and that, who probably has a girl pregnant by now. And that's not who I am. And so it's like, people would say, 'oh, you're acting like a girl' because you don't do things that a guy should do. So it's, I don't know. It's not being a macho, I guess. (Jimmy, Latino, 18 yrs. old, Gay)

Similar to Jimmy's response about gender in the context of his ethnic community, Sam responded to questions about his Hispanic identity experience in this way:

(Interviewer) Tell me some of the negative things about being Hispanic.

(Participant) Machismo. ...that's my dad's idea that you have to be strong. Be really, really manly. (Sam, Latino, 18 yrs. old, Gay)

Culturally grounded messages about masculinity within Latino cultures have been identified elsewhere and typically center on the concept of "machismo" (Mirande, 1997). Machismo, a term that was used by a few Latino study participants in their reflections on masculinity and manhood, comprises a set of cultural scripts related to masculinity, to which individual Latino men assimilate to varying degrees (Mirande, 1997). Particularly notable was the finding that only Latino participants used a distinct language or terminology for discussing an ethnic culturally specific template for masculinity. We suspect that the lack of a culturally specific language used to discuss masculinity among African American and European American participants is in part rooted in the far lesser degree to which English is a gendered language as compared to Spanish, reflecting a more explicit role that gender plays in framing life and cultural experiences for Latinos (White, Valenzuela, Kozlowska-MacGregor, & Leung, 2004).

Gendering Race and Ethnicity: The quotes above illustrated how masculinity is constructed in an ethnic or culturally specific framework; in essence, they describe the culturalizing of gender. In all cases of the *culturalizing gender* theme in this sample, the participants who made these connections were Latino. However, we observed a related, yet distinct concept, in the interviews of some of the African American and European American participants which comprised acts of gendering racial or ethnic experience. That is, when asked to discuss images and messages they hear related to their ethnic identity, several participants reported gender-specific ways that their ethnic group was viewed by others. We are conceptualizing this construction of race and ethnicity in a gender specific framework, *gendering race and ethnicity*. For example, two African American participants responded to questions about how people see their ethnic group in these ways:

(Participant) ...when they see a Black guy, what they think in their mind, things like that, right? Okay. Well, from what I heard, and from what I see, uh, they're lazy. They want, they want everything for free. They just want to cheat their way out of everything and back to that whole tough guy look. I mean, everybody looks at them and then I guess scary or dangerous or ah, viscous. Um, they don't take care of their children. They don't know how to reinact [*sic*] with their children. They're not father figures. ...honestly, I mean, I don't know any good qualities from Black guys. (Darryl, African American, 21 yrs. old, "homosexual")

(Participant) [Chuckles] I have heard some crazy things. Um, like, like a friend of mine from my other job and stuff, she was like, [sighs] ...she wouldn't date or have sex with a European American guy or any other race, because she was like saying that only an African American guy is the best. Like especially if they know to work it...She was like it feels good and stuff... (Rafael, African American, 22 yrs. old, Gay)

Across both of these responses, it is clear that in the U.S. people continue to receive messages that men who are African American are criminal, violent, and highly sexualized or exoticized as sexually pleasing. These historical and stereotypical images of male African Americans have been noted elsewhere (Staples, 1994) and are arguably the foundation for racist ideologies that represent African Americans as inferior.

In contrast to African American and Latino participants, European American participants were far more hesitant to elaborate on details regarding their ethnic identity and rarely made connections between ethnic identity and gender or sexuality. Nonetheless, two European American participants discussed race and gender, infusing class as an inextricable factor:

(Participant) I get all the wrong messages, like you see in the movies, the White guys always, or not always, but in a lot of cases, the educated rich, you know, better than thou person. ...this is how you get the message, that it's better to be White and it's easier. ...in society it is more of, you get more advantages for being White. And it's just like what you see in like the media doesn't do anything but enforce those kind of ideas. It's easier to exist in this world, [as] a middle-class, White male. And because you get better job opportunities, jobs, you generally get better pay and I'm completely dissatisfied with that. Because I don't think I should make better pay than anybody else. It should be on qualification, it shouldn't really be on race, but I'm kind of satisfied with my role but that's because I am in a position where I can be, but like I don't think I have any right to be satisfied with where I am. (Alan, European American, 18 yrs. old, Gay and Queer)

Addressing a different aspect of the race-class-gender interaction than that addressed by Alan, Alex talked about the role of having money or being upper class in shielding well dressed European American young men from being labeled “gay.”

(Participant) On the [side of town in which many middle and upper class White people reside], it's like the really preppy [men dress well]... but not so well that you might be gay. And if you are, then you better have a lot of money to prove that you're not gay (laughs), you just dress well. (Alex, European American, 17 yrs. old, Gay)

Across both the culturalizing gender and gendering race and ethnicity themes, the quotes above illustrate the various ways participants learned about what it means to be an adolescent male in specific ethnic and economic contexts.

Non-Traditional Messages—Participants not only reported learning various traditional messages about masculinity, they also reported messages which differed from traditional images of masculinity. Some participants reported learning from parents or from society in general that men did not need to fit into the dominant definition of manhood or masculinity. For example:

(Participant) Well, my family, I never really got too much from them about that. I mean, my parents were never really some people like, oh, you're, you can't do girly things. ...I just never really... got ...a hard and fast definition. Like you have to be this. Um, they would pretty much just let me be who I wanted to be. (Terrell, European American, 16 yrs. old, Gay)

(Interviewer) ... What kinds of things did you hear?

(Participant) Just be yourself. That's all I can...

(Interviewer) That's what you heard growing up, men should just be yourself?

(Participant) Just be yourself. Yeah.

(Interviewer) And what does that mean?

(Participant) Don't copy off of somebody. Just be yourself. (Will, African American, 20 yrs. old, Gay)

The quotes above do not suggest that young GBQ males interpreted the content of these non-traditional messages as messages that directly opposed traditional views of masculinity. That is, no participants suggested that they heard messages about masculinity that encouraged men to be the opposite of the dominant image, such as, “a real man is one who will cry when he is in pain.” These non-traditional messages were contradicting traditional messages, but not inherently suggesting a directly opposing image. Nonetheless, they demonstrate potential frameworks for flexible or non-oppressive expectations of males’ gender expression.

Negotiating Masculinity

In addition to soliciting descriptive information about their own and others’ conceptualizations of masculinity, we asked participants whether they saw themselves fitting into dominant messages about masculinity. These questions were designed to learn how participants created and negotiated their own gender identity in their day-to-day lives. We also examined data related to participants’ sexual and ethnic identities in order to identify ways that masculinity and manhood were discussed. Below are participants’ responses that indicate how they navigated masculinity expectations and ideologies, as well as our interpretations of the range of strategies these young men’s stories represent.

Maleness vs. Masculinity—In response to our questions about what they thought of society’s messages about what it means to be a man, several participants discussed their own criteria for defining manhood. Core to the definition of maleness for some participants was biology, namely genitalia. Ron, a 20 year old European American gay identified man talked about it in this way:

(Interviewer) So what does it mean to be a man? So from your perspective.

(Participant) I mean, I guess in my mind, I’m like, anybody should be how they want to be. Like you can act anyway you want. If you have a penis, then you’re a man, I mean, if you have a penis and you don’t want a vagina, then you’re a man....

(Ron, European American, 20 yrs. old, Gay)

Similarly, Trevor, who was 23 and bisexual-identified, highlighted male genitalia, not behavior, as key to determining male status.

(Participant) A man should act any type of way, because you’re a man before anything, no matter if you act sissyish.

(Interviewer) Is that what you heard growing up, like it doesn’t matter if you’re a sissy or, as long as you...?

(Participant) From my family, growing up, very much, I never heard anything really about how a man should act. Because all the men in my family are masculine. So I very much grew up around masculine men. But I was always in the house with a bunch of females. So I have feminine ways, too. But very much you will see more of the masculine side of me than anything else. I’m not saying that you won’t see the feminine side, either, so it’s still what I’m saying is I’m a man before I’m anything. And that’s what people fail to realize about being gay, homosexual, or however you look at it. That they still have the male organ between their legs. (Trevor, African American, 23 yrs. old, Bisexual)

Because Trevor and Ron’s definitions of maleness do not consider behavior and sexual orientation as the only dictators of maleness, it appears to create the possibility of multiple masculinities grounded in a biological conceptualization of maleness. The concept of “multiple masculinities” accounts for “both differences among men and the ways in which ideas of masculinity change according to time, the event, and the perspectives of those

involved” (Imms, 2000, p. 156). This concept offers a language for communicating a range of roles and expression available to biological males outside of the hegemonic masculinity ideology. However, Trevor’s statement indicates that while any male with a penis can call himself a man, there are biological sex-linked behaviors that comprise the concepts of masculinity and femininity. In this way, Trevor, as is the case with many of the study participants, does not fully adopt the concept of multiple masculinities. Non-traditional ways of expressing masculinity continue to be categorized as inherently “feminine.”

Balancing the Feminine and Masculine—A major set of strategies that emerged from the data centered on participants’ processes of balancing traits or behaviors they labeled as feminine and masculine. Though this was a very common unifying theme, participants varied in their philosophy of gendered behavior. For example, some participants suggested that being gay inherently makes a male more feminine or woman-like, and in this way the mere identifying as GBQ becomes an effort to balance two genders. Whereas, other participants talked about balancing feminine and masculine traits in ways that were not inherently tied to sexual identity, but rather to beliefs that reflect essentialist perspectives on expressions of biological sex. Important to understanding the context of these young men’s lives, we paid particular attention to the ways they negotiated balancing masculinity and femininity and found that their negotiation strategies had various functions that had related but distinct characteristics.

Masculinity Negotiation Functions

Avoiding anti-gay attitudes and violence: A theme in why participants managed masculinity in their day-to-day lives was the advantage of maintaining more masculine appearances and behaviors in settings hostile to gay people. For Thomas, the concealment of effeminate characteristics was necessary to maintain safety in settings inhabited by a crowd of predominantly heterosexual male peers.

(Participant) No, okay, yeah, depending on who I’m around, then I become like more gay or like more manly. So just in general like if I’m just by myself, that’s how I feel. Like when not influenced by other people.

(Interviewer) Tell me a little bit about some of these other situations.

(Participant) Like if I’m around other gay friends or whatever, we’re also like flaming sometimes, like we’ll just Karaoke-ing or seeing musical theater then, the gayness comes out. So like...[but] if I’m at like frat parties or something, sometimes I’m just more manly, because like for fear of getting beaten up or something, you know, but not all the time. (Thomas, Latino, 19 yrs. old, Gay)

Multiple participants referred to physical safety as the primary reason for acting more masculine and concealing their sexuality.

Fitting in: In contrast, Kevin discussed similar context-specific behaviors where he played down behaviors that might be viewed as non-masculine, but for different reasons than participants like Thomas who sought to protect their physical safety.

(Interviewer) So I mean, then how do you...view yourself [as a man] being a gay male, because it’s almost like, from what you’re saying, like to be a man you need to be all these straight characteristics.

(Participant) Yeah. I feel that being masculine and being gay, I feel that it’s kind of a balance of both. I feel that I wanted to maintain as much of being like that masculine guy, that looks like a male, that acts like a male, but, but still carrying as many homosexual qualities as possible. Does that make sense? Like... I guess

being like, when I'm with my friends that are girls, being like the gentleman, and respecting women and like opening doors and just kind of the, the typical masculine things that you should do. (Kevin, European American, 20 yrs. old, Gay)

For Kevin, the stated function for changing his presentation of masculine behaviors was to fit in with his peer group. However, it is unclear how he understood the consequences of expressing “homosexual qualities” among his heterosexual friends. It is possible that his efforts to fit in with his peer group required behaviors that helped him avoid his friends’ potential anti-gay attitudes as well.

Although the strategies described by Thomas and Kevin served different functions, they both hid or avoided expressing any mannerisms that may indicate to others that they are gay. Their efforts to change their self presentation are similar to the primary strategy for managing heterosexism identified by Wilson and Miller (2002). In their work with mostly adult African American gay and bisexual men, Wilson and Miller (2002) reported on “role flexing” techniques (i.e., acting more masculine) used by participants in non gay-friendly settings in order to conceal their sexuality and protect themselves from anti-gay violence. The similarities in strategies used to negotiate hegemonic masculinities in this study and the strategies used to manage heterosexism identified in Wilson and Miller’s (2002) study make sense given the quotes above which indicated young gay and bisexual men’s perceptions that heterosexuality was a required aspect of a valid masculine identity. Thus, the more heterosexuality is considered synonymous with or a key component of dominant masculinity ideology, the more likely we might see similar strategies used by gay and bisexual men for negotiating both masculinity expectations and heterosexism. Further, the similarities in strategies also support arguments made by other scholars which highlight the inextricably tied nature of heterosexism, sexism and gender ideologies (Buchbinder, 1994; Frank, Kehler, Lovell & Davidson, 2003; Herek, 1986; Kimmel, 1995; William, 2005).

Because a man should be manly: Not all participants sought to balance their masculinity and femininity or conceal their femininity for the purpose of concealing their sexuality. When asked about his own beliefs about how a man should be, one participant, Robert, reported limiting the expression of behaviors associated with femininity and increasing behaviors associated with masculinity in order to mold himself into his own and others’ images of masculinity.

(Participant) ...[a man] should be older in his lifestyle, you cut off the lip-gloss, because when you younger, you want to put on the lip-gloss. You want to put on the makeups [*sic*] and all that...but as you get older, all of that change. You become handsome instead of trying to be pretty. When I was younger, I wanted to be pretty, but I realize I'm a handsome man. And that's what I molded myself into a man. ...That's like, the makeup, the clothes, honestly, we fight so much for how we don't want people to look at us like this, or say this stuff about thing, but it's the same way you have to carry yourself. You know what I'm saying? You can't walk into a job with some tight jeans on and all this and think they gonna get the job. No, you got to present yourself a certain way. And I just, I never got into the feminine thing, well, I can't say I ain't got into it, but I don't see it now. It's something I hope they grow out of. Because I grew out of it, and I think you will. As you get older, it's just how things start to go on in your mind, you think a little different. (Robert, African American, 22 yrs. old, Gay)

Contrasting other participants’ efforts to adopt and display traditional masculine gender expressions solely to avoid the label of “gay,” Robert links his abandonment of feminine ways of expression to maturing into adulthood. However, it is important to note that he also acknowledged that a challenge to emerging adulthood is entering the workforce, a task

complicated for young males who wear clothing and “carry” themselves in ways that fall outside of traditional expectations.

Creating the best of both worlds: In contrast to participants who attempted to hide aspects of their femininity and amplify their masculinity, other participants discussed embracing both aspects of their gender expression. The participants who discussed this approach to balancing femininity and masculinity appeared to do so to create their view of manhood or personhood, one that integrated what they perceived to be the best of both gender qualities

(Interviewer) So you've told me about the messages that you've gotten about what it means to be a man and how men are supposed to act. How do you fit into all this?

(Participant) Kind of in-between.

(Interviewer) Tell me about that.

(Participant) Well, I said earlier, like I, on a regular basis, I go through a morning ritual where like I remove a good portion of my body hair. And for parties, like tonight, I'll be in the mirror for like an hour, plucking my eyebrows, not to arch them, but to clean them and shape them. And I'll go to Sephora on my way home and get, well, after I get my hair cut, (chuckles) I'll get foundation put on to clear my, make my skin look clear. And some mascara to make my already long eyelashes appear longer. Um, I do my own manicures at home, which I haven't done in a while because I've been working a lot lately and it just defeats the purpose... so, and in many senses of the word I consider myself slightly effeminate, but in a good way. Because I'm nice, I don't discriminate against people in general. Only people I really discriminate against are young African American straight youths, because they discriminate against me to such a point where I have to like physically and like mentally prepare myself if I'm approaching them, take other routes.

... (Interviewer) So what is it like to be in between in that way?

(Participant) I think it makes me more rounded as a person. It makes me more, a lot more rounded as a person... (Todd, African American, 19 yrs. old, Gay)

For Todd, “being in between” meant enjoying prepping of his face and body in ways that are traditionally feminine in U.S. culture and accepting himself when not fully made up as the masculine side. For other participants, such as Sam, the blending of characteristics associated with femininity and masculinity occurred through the claiming of emotionality, which was viewed as a woman’s characteristic and family responsibility, which was viewed as a man’s characteristic. Sam talked about his family believing that men are supposed to take care of their families and they are not supposed to cry or show emotion. We then asked:

(Interviewer) So where do you see yourself fitting into these ideas of what it means to be a man?

(Participant) Ah, I don't really fit into their idea. I have my own ideas. Being a man is just being you that makes yourself who you are. Being, well, a man to me is a really successful person who will actually take up the family regards of other things and yeah...it's a whole different idea from theirs. It's somewhat similar, but just with emotion and not emotionless.

(Interviewer) ...Could you say more about that? Like where is it different?

(Participant) Because, well, what I keep getting from my father is that a man doesn't cry. A man doesn't whine. A man doesn't do this, doesn't do that. Like

emotionally-wise. Just the whole purpose, just be there, stone wall or something. So I just figure different. (Sam, Latino, 18 yrs. old, Gay)

In this passage, Sam delineated the values associated with masculinity with which he agreed, such as being responsible for family, and also clarified the areas with which he disagreed, such as pressure to be emotionless. On the one hand, embracing a man's right to cry may reflect changing attitudes towards men's emotionality (Messner, 1993). However, it may be more plausible that Sam, like other young men in Pascoe's (2003) study of adolescent heterosexual male masculinity and Davidson's (2006) case study of a bisexual Latino young man's schooling experiences, was negotiating hegemonic masculinity through the reworking of meanings of gender identity and masculinity to suit his own sense of self. That is, the resistance narratives and redefined expressions of appropriate masculinity we identified among young GBQ males may be grounded in an effort to situate themselves in the image of manhood. In either case, it is a sign of resilience that some of the participants appear to identify ways to mold ideologies of masculinity to ensure their own inclusion and to avoid viewing themselves in deficit terms.

Just trying to be me: For some participants, the act of balancing masculinity and femininity was less about blending prescribed gender role expectations and more about dismantling them altogether. In response to a question about how he viewed the messages about masculinity, Frank, a gay identified 18 year old, asserts his frustration with their restrictions:

(Interviewer) Um, well, what do you think about those messages?

(Participant) Um, I don't like any like anything that society imposes on anybody. I think that people should do what they like to do and think how they want to think and not be influenced by society. I understand like everyone's influenced by their people, I mean, that's something that you can't really escape. Like they should listen to their own music and not listen to like rock and roll just because that's what other guys listen to or not like cars because other guys like cars or not like football because other guys like football. Like they should go and play badminton if they want to, or whatever. Um, I wish people would just be themselves. (Frank, European American, 18 yrs. old, Gay)

Lonnie, an 18 year old, bisexual-identified male, reflected similar sentiments:

(Interviewer) What things do you agree with about some of these messages [about being a man] that we just talked about?

(Participant) Um, I agree with having an education. Um, speaking properly when times calls for it. Um, like if you're going for yourself or your family, just not letting the world carry you down with it as opposed to not taking care of your business....[such as with] drugs or alcohol, that take over your body.

(Interviewer) What things do you disagree with about some of those messages?

(Participant) Um, I disagree with some of the stereotypes, like I said, about the homosexual men, how they, some people say they have to walk or talk or dress or act a certain way. Or how they say a straight man should not like have a nice haircut or clean fingernails or dress nice. (Lonnie, African American, 18 yrs. old, Bisexual)

In his declaration, Lonnie disagrees that men should be expected to act any one particular way; he also indicates that he agrees with some aspects of masculinity ideology that promote responsibility and health. This reflects the overall theme of *just trying to be me* or the idea that no specific set of characteristics prescribe what it means to be a man regardless of sexual orientation.

SUMMARY AND SOCIAL ACTION IMPLICATIONS

Our data analyses suggest that during critical years of development, GBQ male adolescents are exposed to societal messages regarding masculinity—several of the same messages as those received by non-GBQ male adolescents. These traditional masculinity ideology messages are emanating primarily from four important socializing systems in an adolescent's life: family, peers, school, and the media (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The messages have an impact on adolescent males since they include implicit and explicit mandates for expected cognitions, affect, and behavior. Young men who do not conform to these traditional images of manhood experience verbal and physical forms of social pressure, a problem echoed in this study's findings. Further complicating the picture, the young men in our study discussed how masculinity messages are intertwined with issues of race and ethnicity, such that young men from different ethnic/racial groups are exposed to additional messages and mandates regarding expected behaviors. This process occurred in two distinct ways—with either the construction and presentation of masculinity being embedded within an ethnically or culturally specific framework ("culturalizing gender"), or the construction and presentation of ethnicity being embedded within a gendered framework ("gendering race and ethnicity"). Two European American participants discussed class as an additional factor that was interwoven with race and gender.

We found that the youth in the current study described varied ways by which they negotiated their sense of who they are as young men against the backdrop of a hegemonic masculinity that positions heterosexuality as a core feature (Connell, 1995). At one extreme, some of the young men described conscious efforts to alter their overall gendered presentation by permanently eliminating feminine behaviors and adopting masculine behaviors, serving both the function of avoiding anti-gay hostility and to fit in with male peer groups. Other young men who were comfortable with possessing both masculine and feminine characteristics discussed how they have successfully blended the most appealing qualities of the two genders, while others spoke of attempting to dismantle stereotypes and rigid expectations related to gender performance altogether as they created their own scripts for gender expression. Noteworthy is that within the context of describing these approaches, several youth equated feminine qualities/characteristics with being gay/bisexual, such that a display of feminine acts would be a public acknowledgement of their sexual orientation. This again creates a challenge for GBQ young men as they attempt to develop their integrated sexual and gender identities, since many of them have internalized societal messages of equating gendered behaviors/expressions with sexual orientation.

As has been suggested by studies with adult gay men (Diaz, 1998; Levine, 1998; Wolfe, 2003), questions and doubts about one's masculinity or manhood may be associated with participation in sexual risk behaviors. Young men who are questioning or struggling with their masculinity may over-compensate or attempt to prove their masculinity by adopting and enacting risky sexual behaviors they perceive as being part of the behavioral repertoire associated with being a man. Participants in the current study did not specifically report having engaged in sexual behavior as a way of negotiating masculinity expectations. Further, the study was not designed to explore the totality of their sexual behavior, and as such did not lend itself to the type of examination of patterns across the masculinity and sexual behavior sections that may have highlighted connections between participants' sexual activity and managing masculinity ideologies. Nonetheless, participants noted multiple connections between definitions of masculinity and sexual behavior among men in general, such as adopting a conquest perspective towards sex, having sex with multiple partners, and avoiding emotional attachment in sexual relationships. If all of these behaviors were practiced with the consistent and correct use of condoms they would not present health risks. However, the alarmingly high rates of HIV among young men who have sex with men

demonstrate that this level of condom use is not occurring (MacKellar et al., 2005; Wolitski et al., 2001). Thus, young GBQ males' attempts to "prove" their masculinity—both to others and to themselves—may be contributing to their increased risk of HIV.

Given the primacy of sexual activity in the definitions and expressions of masculinity as discussed by the participants and the potential for GBQ male youth to experience internal and external pressure to "prove" their masculinity through sex, it will be important that HIV prevention efforts for GBQ youth incorporate issues of masculinity and identity into their interventions. These programs and other social action efforts need to acknowledge the multiple layers of powerful social messages and expectations related to masculinity that young GBQ men experience, and the multiple systems within which these pressures are perpetuated. Such interventions should help youth identify and critically analyze these potentially damaging messages, and to understand how such messages can serve as a form of social oppression for GBQ young men that may impact their health and well-being (Diaz, Ayala, & Bein, 2004; Harper & Schneider, 2003; Smith, 2005). This could be done using a sociopolitical development framework whereby youth are taught skills and provided with the capacity to bring about social and political action in various systems in an effort to resist oppression (Watts, Williams, & Jager, 2003). Watts, Abdul-Adil, & Pratt (2002) have used a psychoeducational approach to develop critical thinking skills and critical consciousness (which facilitate sociopolitical development) among young African American men by analyzing messages in popular culture movies and rap videos related to gender, culture, race, and social class. A sociopolitical development intervention tailored to assist GBQ male youth in understanding masculinity ideologies and the dynamics of oppression specific to LGBT communities/people, and which teaches strategies for resisting oppressive hegemonic masculinity ideologies, may be a promising approach to HIV prevention.

Social action efforts also need to help bolster the resiliency of GBQ young men, and to assist them in successfully integrating their various identities. This could be accomplished through a range of individual and group-based psychoeducational, media/art-based, insight-oriented, and/or experiential activities directly with youth that assist them in finding ways to integrate their unique multiple identity mosaic. By conducting some of these activities in group settings, interventions will help to build social support with other young men who may also be navigating the integration of their multiple identities. Building connections with mentors and supportive adults in the community can offer youth a venue for discussing and continuing to analyze their various identities and connections in safe environments. In Davidson's (2006) case study, a young Latino bisexual male conveyed how he learned ways of resisting rigid cultural scripts around masculinity. His primary strategy for doing this was through observing his bicultural Guatemalan-born grandmother's reconceptualization of ethnic and national identities to address the unique needs of her family. In essence, she rethought definitions of what it meant to be Guatemalan and American so they would work for her, and her grandson learned how to do this with his own gender nonconforming expression. Therefore, health interventions could also benefit by identifying and drawing from natural mentors that already teach ways of resisting dominant and oppressive constructions of peoples' various social identities. Involvement in formalized community activities may be another mechanism for GBQ youth to build positive connections with youth and adults, as Ramirez-Valles & Diaz (2005) have demonstrated some empirical links between community involvement and both self-esteem and social support among adult gay Latino men. Given the influence of family, peers, school, and the media in promoting images and expectations related to masculinity, interventions are also needed within these systems. Such programs may work with families and school personnel to understand the powerful influence parents and teachers have on perceptions regarding masculinity and sexuality, and how they can be supportive of the multiple identity integration process of these young men.

Study Strengths and Limitations

Various strengths of this study were mentioned above, including the exploration of messages about masculinity from the perspectives of GBQ adolescent youth and young adults, attention to context and variation in responses to these messages, inclusion of an ethnically diverse sample of GBQ youth, and maintaining the explicit goal to inform the development of culturally grounded interventions. Additionally, documenting the current and historical narratives of young GBQ males is an important contribution. These data may help both contemporary efforts to develop HIV protection and mental health promotion programs, as well as future efforts to examine changes in constructions and responses to masculinity throughout U.S. history.

Nonetheless, this study has some limitations. Though the sample was diverse with regard to ethnicity and sexual orientation, given that the primary sites for recruitment were community agencies, the sample primarily consisted of GBQ youth who access LGBT-related community services. As such, it may be that these youth's constructions of masculinity and strategies for navigating masculinity ideologies were influenced by the LGBT-affirming services they have received at these community agencies. Thus, youth who have not received such supportive services may not feel as comfortable with their sexuality and thus demonstrate different patterns of negotiation. In addition, the study did not systematically examine participants' views of femininity and how they conceptualized and labeled certain characteristics or behaviors as "feminine" vs. "masculine." Some participants did spontaneously discuss particular behaviors or actions as "feminine," but we did not further probe to understand how GBQ young men distinguish behaviors that are expected of males, of females or of all adult persons (e.g., responsibility). Also, the question about participants emotional or psychological responses to what it was like "fitting" or "not fitting" in with various masculinity messages was added after the validation phase of data collection. Therefore, the first set of participants interviewed were not asked these questions, limiting our data on the impacts of negotiating masculinity expectations on the psychological and emotional well being of GBQ young men. Finally, another methodological limitation of this study was that we only interviewed participants at one point in time; thus we were not able to learn more about the developmental process of masculinity construction and negotiation as it occurred over time.

Conclusion

Both the blended and novel conceptualizations of masculinity demonstrate the strength and resiliency of the GBQ adolescents and young adults in our sample. Many of these young men have endured a multitude of negative societal consequences based on their sexual orientation, and despite these experiences of heterosexism many have created their own masculinity ideologies that to some extent incorporate positive themes and goals. These data are useful in that they provide contextual and cultural understanding of how some young GBQ males construct masculinity and how they confront hegemonic masculinity in their day-to-day lives. As such, we have a sense of a starting point for facilitating young men in discussions of gender identity that aim to promote sociopolitical and cultural development, with the long term goal of encouraging wellness and sexual health.

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