Keeping a \textit{Str8} Face: 
Gay Sex, Straight Men, and Hetero Performativity

by

William H. Bosha
Class of 2019

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Departmental Honors in Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

Middletown, Connecticut April, 2019
Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.................................................................3

Introduction..................................................................................5

Chapter One
Boys Will Be Boys: The Gay Sex of Straight Men..........................14

Chapter Two
Flipping the Script: The Gay Eroticization of Straight White Masculinity....50

Chapter Three
Straightened Out: Heteromasculine Idealization in the Queer Community...85

Conclusion: Why You Can’t Defeat the Gay Agenda.................................106

Bibliography................................................................................112
Acknowledgements

I want to take a moment to recognize all the amazing individuals who supported me throughout the course of this project and my life.

Thank you to Professor Victoria Pitts-Taylor, my thesis advisor, for your constant help during this unbelievably arduous process. Your critique and praise have kept me going. More importantly, thank you for introducing me to the world of feminist theory. You have opened my eyes and given me words to articulate that which had no name. None of this would be possible if I hadn’t sat in your gateway course as a second semester freshman.

Thank you to Professor Margot Weiss, who introduced me to critical queer theory and read my earlier work on this topic. You taught me to question everything. Along the way, I’ve even found a few answers.

Thank you to Professor Kerwin Kaye, who introduced me to the writing of Jane Ward. Her book has not left my bedside in almost two years, so all of this is kind of your fault.

To my family, thank you for your constant love and support. Thank you to my mother, who knew when to call and when to leave me alone. Thank you to Jack, who helped distract me when I was in dire need of distraction.

Thank you to Max, James, Harrison, and Collin. You all made Trinity-Pawling a little more bearable and a little more fun. If it weren’t for you, I might not be here today.
To my Wesleyan friends: thank you, thank you, thank you. I am so blessed to be surrounded by such varied, intelligent individuals. Thank you for laughing with me and for taking me seriously while I ranted about gay porn.

Thank you to Tesheia van der Horst. You are the Buffy to my Willow, the Foucault to my Butler, the Pisces to my Cancer. I have never been able to talk to someone the way I talk with you. You give me the strength to allow myself to be weak. I don’t know where your future will bring you, I just hope it isn’t too far from me.

Thank you to everyone who cheered me on and showed interest in this writing. Your encouragement, however small, means the world to me.

Finally, thank you to all the straight boys I ever loved. If you see this, call me.
Introduction

During my second year at an all-boys preparatory school, I sat outside the choir room with Charles, one of my classmates. We were discussing our weekend plans when Charles casually – albeit proudly – indicated his plans included more than homework: Charles was going home to get a blowjob. But this wasn’t your average oral sex: Charles was getting sucked off with his best friend. As a closeted queer who admittedly enjoyed challenging my heterosexual friends – enough to irritate without raising suspicion – I had questions:

“I don’t know,” I wondered. “Sounds kinda gay.”

Charles fought back; after all, those were fighting words. How could it be gay, Charles claimed, when he was a getting a blowjob from a girl?

But I wanted to know the logistics: would they sit side by side, with their penises out, while this girl performed oral sex on the two of them? Would she bring one to climax and then begin on the other? Or perhaps one friend would wait outside while the other received, and then they would switch places?

These questions didn’t matter to Charles. The only thing relevant to him was that he would be receiving oral sex from a girl. But that isn’t to say he was fully unenthused about the presence of his male friend: in fact, his friend’s presence wasn’t some cost of the sexual agreement, it was its own point of excitement. Key to the erotic nature of this planned encounter was the presence of Charles’ friend and that it was specifically his best friend.

“It’s not gay if it’s your best friend,” as Charles so aptly put it.
Months later, I heard rumors that our school administration was in the midst of disciplinary proceedings regarding an act of hazing: a group of sophomores in my own dormitory held down a freshman, removed his pants, and wrote homophobic epithets on and inside his exposed buttocks. Their scrawlings included the obvious hits, like *faggot* or *cumwhore*, but they got creative too. One boy even went as far as to circle the student’s anus with a magic marker, drawing an arrow to an instruction on one of his cheeks to “*insert dick here.*” Only later did I realize that this event was neither an act of involuntary hazing nor an assault: it was not the idea of the sophomores who committed this act, but the freshman who was held down and written on – the turning of his ass into a mural of sexualized homophobia was as much a joke to him as it was to the boys who did the writing. The school charged all participants accordingly, as they had all *equally* violated codes of nonacademic conduct.

Years after that, as a now openly queer man at Wesleyan University, I returned to my high school to see a theatrical production. During my return, a friend of mine – currently a senior – pulled me aside to tell a story I did not expect to hear: a year earlier, after being elected as one of our school’s “*prefects,*” or student leaders, my friend was subject to a hazing ritual. He was blindfolded, marched into the woods, and ordered to strip naked. My friend and the other newly elected students were ordered to perform what I can only describe as a *mounting ritual*, in which the prefect receiving the least amount of votes for his position would stand on his hands and knees while the rest of his respective class were to sit – one by one, back to back, all entirely nude – on the back of their fellow student. They were told that this was a
necessary act, one that would make the young men “close” and “strengthen their manhood.” My friend refused, one of the only two in a group of seven to do so. He was criticized aggressively and told that he had “betrayed the brotherhood.”

These events are not isolated but exist within the larger context of a school culture where nipple tweaking and the slapping or even fingering of a friend’s ass were seen as normal, masculine, and heterosexual. Examples like these are not aberrant but exist merely as points in a far larger constellation of homosexual behavior between straight-identifying white men. Heterosexual men inculcate this general homoeroticism with both homophobic and misogynistic discourses, distancing themselves from the faggots and bitches who would be subjected to these same acts while maintaining an alleged sincerity that these straight men supposedly lack. Therefore, the heterosexual engagement in homosexual behavior does not stand in contrast to straight identity but is one of the many discursive methods of identitarian construction that makes heterosexuality seem coherent as an identity in the first place.

In Chapter One, I will give an account of this broad phenomenon. Studies of white male sexual fluidity are greatly lacking and usually aim to provide excuses for this behavior, not unlike the explanations offered by straight-identifying men themselves. One reason for this analytical neglect is the disproportionate focus on the sexual fluidity of black or Latino men, which produced various accounts of nonwhite sexual fluidity through alarmist, pathologizing research. Accounts that do focus on the sexual fluidity of white men tend to provide excuses for their behavior rather than studying them critically in relation to the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and
heteronormativity. Following the framework established by Jane Ward, I categorize these accounts into three general theories: necessary homosexuality, accidental homosexuality, and homosocial homosexuality.

Necessary homosexuality, also referred to as situational homosexuality, is the theory that straight white men have sex with other men when they are “deprived” or isolated from women. In these contexts, it is believed that straight-identifying white men have no choice but to engage in homosexual sex, forced to release their supposedly insurmountable sexual energy by any means necessary. Such accounts are offered in cases relating to the military, boarding schools, the prison, or anywhere else where men are frequently isolated from the opposite sex. While this theory is its own rhetorical device, a “sexual script” that straight men use to recode their homosexual activity as heteromasculine, as an analysis it falls short in a few major regards. Mainly, situational homosexuality does not account for the many situations in which straight white men have sex and are not isolated from women. Fraternities are a fitting example: homosexuality is not only present but actively sanctioned and ritualized, yet interaction with women is frequent.

Accidental homosexuality is far more self-explanatory: straight white men are having gay sex accidentally, usually in cases of intoxication or confusion. This trope is deployed in cases where masculine tomfoolery or drunken absurdity lead to homosexual contact between straight men and the scripts of homosocial or necessary homosexuality are less accessible, usually according to the substance of these acts or the institutional context where they are committed. While this theory is somewhat infrequently cited by the straight white men I am studying, this concept that
drunkenness or intoxication results in a heterosexual engagement in homosexual sex is highly eroticized in gay pornographic iconography, as I’ll discuss in Chapter Two.

Homosocial homosexuality does not account for hetero-homo activity as a result of deprivational contexts, but rather as the means by which straight men forge bonds with their fellow man. This script is popularly cited in the military, fraternities, or all-boys boarding schools. Both homosocial and necessary homosexuality were invoked in my former high school, where the homosexual activity of straight-identifying white boys is seen as both a cause of the all-male environment and yet simultaneously as one of the primary methods that heterosexual men use to forge the homosocial connections of brotherhood. Homosocial homosexuality is particularly important to my discussion of hazing, when homosexual acts are institutionally ritualized and justified through this discourse.

While I study these three theories of sex between straight white men for the purposes of outlining their discursive use by heterosexuals, I reject them as actual explanations of this phenomenon. I reject further the implication that the study of white male sexual fluidity is somehow an inherent interrogation of whether the subjects of this research are ‘truly’ straight or ‘truly’ queer and only suppressing their sexuality due to internalized homophobia. As already stated, the homosexual acts committed by straight-identifying men do not stand in contrast to their heterosexual identities: the committal of these acts – and the subsequent process of queer disavowal or heteromasculine recoding accomplished by the sexual scripts of necessity, accidentality, and homosociality – is one of the many ways that straight men codify their masculine heterosexual identity. This project is then a retheorization
of sexual identities not as representations of merely *whom* we have sex with, but *how* we have that sex, the context in which that sex occurs, and our personal and political takeaways from our engagement in said behavior. I argue that the ways in which heterosexual white men engage in homosexual sex and then distance themselves from queer subjectivity is part of the distinction that makes those men straight while other men who engage in sometimes identical behavior are gay.

In Chapter Two, I will flip this discussion and analyze how straight white men and their hetero-homo activity are depicted and eroticized in gay pornography. Here, I divide these pornographic representations into three primary genres: narrative porn, amateur porn, and gonzo porn. These different genres of gay pornography eroticize straight men in distinct ways; some relying upon narrative and setting, others relying upon a subtle usage of heteromasculine props, others relying upon performative repulsion or disgust. This pornographic typology helps decode the different ways in which straightness is performed by gay men (and in the case of gay-for-pay performers, straight men) for queer, erotic purposes.

I call this appropriation of straight-acting masculinity ‘*hetero performativity,*’ where gay men use different clothing, bodily performances, and sexual discourses to imbue their sex with heterosexual meaning while maintaining an unspoken, queer subjectivity. This practice generates an erotic dissonance in which gay men contrast their queer subjectivities and sex acts with an ironic performance of heterosexuality. Hetero performativity is limited temporally and exists only within sexual contexts; its usage *must* have a clear start and end, and it *must* be deployed for specifically erotic
means. In this sense, it is fair to understand hetero performativity as a form of erotic roleplay, the performed role being that of the straight men I discuss in Chapter One.

I refer to the measure of credibility in these heterosexual performances as ‘str8 realness,’ meaning the degree to which the subjects of different pornography successfully present themselves as straight-identifying men. When gay men in this context effectively perform str8 realness, they are not only appropriating the homosexual activity of straight men for their own erotic desires but also subtly dismantling the hetero-homo sexual binary. I use the term realness here to draw theoretical comparisons to ongoing debates of gay male drag – an example of gendered, rather than sexual, performativity. I draw upon the work of Judith Butler to help detail the ways in which hetero performativity has a subversive potentiality and yet risks critically unsubversive reidealizations through its performance of straight-acting white masculinity.

In Chapter Three, I shift my focus to erotic digital spaces like Craigslist where straight white men are both present and seeking sex with other similarly identifying men. I not only note the ways in which straight men are themselves hyperaware of the contexts and discourses that recode their sex as heteromasculine, but also draw attention to how straight men are themselves transient members of the queer community. I elaborate on this discussion by drawing in an analysis of Grindr, where straight – or str8 – men are frequent participants. In relation to my analysis of heteromasculine eroticization in the previous chapter, my aim here is to suggest that straight men are not individuals that exist beyond the confines of queer worlds but are
yet another erotic archetype, existing alongside the other pornographic classifications so dominant in queer culture.

I discuss further the unsubversive risks of hetero performativity in my analysis of Grindr and how the app is a tool of bodily self-regulation. On Grindr, the gay community’s erotic idealization of straight-acting white masculinity produces a space in which participants must either adhere to these bodily ideals or accept their inferiority, an ultimatum I refer to as ‘romantic neoliberalism.’ Under such romantic social regimes, gay men do not only perform heterosexuality temporally for erotic purposes, but every day of their lives; straight-acting white masculine performance is evident in everything they do, from the way these men dress to the muscles they work out to even the way they smile in their profile photos. I call this phenomenon ‘hetero assimilation,’ to help differentiate its practice and effects from that of hetero performativity, which relies upon an entrance and exit into heterosexual performance that is not found in cases of hetero assimilation.

What I aim to assert in this project is not merely that straight white men are having gay sex, but rather that they are limited participants in queer worlds; many gay men with experience in both digital and physical erotic spaces can no doubt share a story or two about their sexual experiences with heterosexual men. The broad eroticization of straight men and their sexual behavior leads to the recodification of “str8 guys” as yet another feature of the gay taxonomical pantheon, rather than as individuals somehow divorced from queer space. The performativity of straightness by both straight and gay-identifying men in both online and offline contexts further dissolves this nonexistent barrier that should allegedly separate the sexual lives of
straight men from the sexual lives of queer men. The increasing presence of straight
men in such spaces is not a necessarily subversive development; it comes with its
own political risks. But my hope is to help dismantle the socially constructed wall
between heterosexuality and homosexuality that straight men have sought to preserve
for so long.
Chapter One

Boys Will Be Boys:
The Gay Sex of Straight Men

Introduction

Straight white men are having gay sex, and lots of it. Depending on who you are, this statement can read as either shocking or completely mundane; as either an obvious point of fact, or as a fascinating site of research. This phenomenon is widespread and engrained in the cultural foundations of American manhood. Sex between straight white men is not aberrant, but rather institutional and ritualized. Its occurrence isn’t suppressed, but rather celebrated. But despite the general familiarity many have with this phenomenon – straight and gay men, in particular – it is left frequently unanalyzed, even in research on sexual fluidity. In fact, the general awareness of this sexual activity between straight white men only leads to a greater obfuscation of its existence.

How is it, then, that sex between straight white men is so common and yet so under-analyzed? The problem lies in a lack of understanding of male sexual fluidity. While female sexuality is increasingly perceived as “receptive and flexible,” men, on the other hand, are assumed to possess a rigidity and strength to their sexual constitution that women supposedly lack (Ward, pg. 13). Women are afforded a degree of sexual fluidity that men are not, provided that they will, eventually, conclude their queer ‘experimentation’ and return fittingly to heterosexual dominion (Ward, pg. 20). Men, on the other hand, “suffer greater gender regulation, have fewer models of male sexual fluidity, and are presumably unrewarded by women for any
sexual fluidity they may express” despite their position on the patriarchal hierarchy (Ward, pg. 12).

This is not to say that sex between straight white men is always completely different from sex between straight women. As Ward states, “straight men do make out at parties for the pleasure of women and engage in virtually the same teasing/kissing/sex-for-show behaviors that straight young women do” (Ward, pg. 13). Part of what separates the sex of straight women from the sex of straight men is that the latter must operate within a heteronormative culture where the most banal homosexual contact is symptomatic of a gay subjectivity (Ward, pg. 20). Therefore, because female same-sex desire is seen as experimental or aberrant but any and all same-sex desire between men is seen as indicative of a suppressed gay identity, straight men launder their homosexual behavior through the protective discourses of “shame, secrecy, homophobia, and disavowal of queerness” (Ward, pg. 20).

A problematic binary emerges. Either the same-sex activity of straight men is neglected completely, or its analysis focuses upon a question of identity: are these men truly straight or are they secretly gay? This line of thinking is based in the idea that our identities are merely a representation of the acts we commit; it seeks discovery of the subject’s ‘true’ sexual identity, one we can determine almost methodically by studying individual sexual acts. Frameworks such as these provide a dangerously myopic lens to view both heterosexual and queer sexualities. As Ward elaborates:

...bodies do not respond only to the “raw facts” of other people’s genitals or other sexed body parts. Instead, our bodies desire other bodies and particular sex acts in their social context; we desire what those body parts represent. We desire particular bodies and particular sex acts and particular erotic scenes and
cultural spheres in large part because they have significant cultural and erotically charged meanings. (Ward, pg. 34)

In other words, any analysis that grounds itself in the “raw facts” of our bodily desires misses the point of analysis completely: it puts the author in the uncomfortable role of sexual policing – determining the boundaries of legitimacy in human sexuality – while paying little attention to how and why gay sex interacts with the masculine power structure. Like Ward, I argue that because these men engage in queer sex while continually insisting their heterosexuality, they are straight. Their allegiance to the sexual norm – their investment in the heteronormative structure – is not simply a caveat of their true sexuality; it is the distinction that makes these men straight while other men gay (Ward, pg. 28).

This clarification – that I am specifically discussing straight white men, not gay men who are closeted or otherwise suppressing a queer identity via internalized homophobia – is central to this project. These men are not having gay sex in spite of their heterosexual identity, but in service of it; their simultaneous engagement in queer sex and self-distancing from queer identity allows for a release of homoerotic tension that reaffirms – rather than challenges – their straightness and heteronormativity as a whole. Similarly, we must understand these straight men as distinct from discussions of “the down-low” – or DL – that pervade earlier sociological work, for two reasons. First, because the down-low is a concept that originates from sex between straight-identifying black men, not white men. And second, because the DL possesses some queer, subversive potentiality that the sex between straight white men tends to lack (McCune, pg. 309). I will return to this point when I discuss the importance of whiteness to my research later in this chapter.
This overview begins with a discussion of this process of queer disavowal, in which men repudiate a gay subjectivity so that their homosexual activity may remain congruent to a heteromasculine identification. Then, I will discuss the where of sex between straight white men, and how its existence is both situationally significant and institutional, and yet simultaneously ubiquitous. Finally, I will cover the whiteness of this phenomenon, and further elaborate on how this behavior is distinct from the sex of black men on the down-low. Understanding the specificities of the sex between straight white men will assist us in further discussion of how this behavior is depicted in gay pornography, and how straightness is appropriated by queer men for subversive and erotic purposes.

No Homo, Bro: The Discourse of Queer Disavowal

*It’s okay, when it’s in a three-way*
*It’s not gay, when it’s in a three-way*
*With a honey in the middle, there’s some leeway*
*The area’s grey in a one-two-three-way*
—The Lonely Island, *3-Way (The Golden Rule)*

As I’ve already established, straight men are having gay sex, but within a social context that perceives any homosexual act as evidence of queer sexuality. Therefore, straight men who intend to commit gay acts – however banal or raunchy – while maintaining their position on the heterosexist ladder must do so within particular contexts and by means of particular discourses that call upon age-old traditions in white masculine culture. This verbal maneuvering allows straight men to engage in homosexual acts, from the most plutonic of touching to full-on anal intercourse, without endangering their hetero credentials.
The most notorious of this discourse in popular culture is the phrase ‘no homo,’ which has reached such comedic familiarity that straight men are unlikely to use it for serious queer disavowal. Defined by Urban Dictionary, no homo is “a phrase used after one inadvertently says something that sounds gay,” or “an addendum to a possibly homosexual-sounding statement” that “works as a ‘Get Out of Jail Free’ card” allowing “the speaker to maintain his heterosexual reputation no matter how homosexual the previous or forthcoming statement” (Urban Dictionary, 2004, 2008). The entry provides the following two statements as examples, both uttered by straight speakers:

*His ass is mine. No homo.*

*I’m coming out of the closet; I am gay. I have had gay sex numerous times, and I am moving to Massachusetts with my boyfriend to have a gay marriage. No homo.*

These are fitting examples because they depict two important aspects of queer disavowal. The first statement deploys no homo in order to de-queer what should be a mundane statement, as we can clearly understand *his ass is mine* in a figurative, or non-sexual context. The usage of no homo or other discourse to reestablish heterosexual identity, even in cases where there would be no possible reason to question that identity, demonstrates the general fragility of heterosexuality itself. Any form of intimacy or contact that could suggest queer intentionality must be constantly repudiated and *no-homo’d* to secure straight certainty. And yet inversely, the second statement demonstrates another usage of queer disavowal: the insistence of heterosexuality in contexts of literal homosexual activity. Now, this second example is obviously an ironic one, as none of the men I am studying would ever say they are “coming out of the closet,” or make the declarative statement that they are gay (they
aren’t, after all). But together, these two statements help paint a picture of how queer disavowal is deployed in both the least and most sexual of contexts. The first statement shows how hegemonic masculinity must police banal language to recertify heterosexual certainty, while the second shows how it instrumentalizes gay sex in service of straight identity by infusing these acts with an active queer disavowal.

Queer disavowal is a such a widespread and multifaceted practice that it is difficult to fully map out its complexities. Its usage is everyday, as men reassert their straightness against one another, particularly in all-male contexts (such as boarding schools, fraternities, the military, and elsewhere) where homosociality is constant and homosexuality is a perpetual threat. My understanding of queer disavowal is grounded in C.J. Pascoe’s theorization of fag discourse: the verbal hurling of homophobic accusations or epithets to challenge the masculinity of another while securing your own (Pascoe, pg. 60). As Pascoe describes, the deployment of fag discourse can be either random or targeted. Pascoe details the frequency at which high schoolers will shout the homophobic slur fag, even when the insult isn’t directed at anyone in particular, as if to remind the general audience to keep up the good fight against the queer threat (Pascoe, pg. 59). More importantly, fag discourse is used by boys and men to police one another’s masculinity or heterosexuality when either are brought into questioning. Such doubt is summonable by rather innocent actions; even two men hanging out alone is enough to invite fag-like accusations (Pascoe, pg. 62). The usual suspects, like engaging in certain “spaces, behaviors, and… bodily practices involving clothing and dancing,” are more likely to mobilize homophobic suspicion (Pascoe, pg. 62).
Fag discourse is a self-replicating phenomenon. The straight boy’s Salem-esque paranoia of queer invaders in a heteromasculine space propels its usage. Here, the “fag identity” is “fluid,” and yet a “hot potato that no boy wanted to be left holding” (Pascoe, pg. 61). If accused yourself of being a fag, you have little choice but to “engage in some sort of discursive contest to turn another boy into a fag” (Pascoe, pg. 61). And given the long list of acts or behaviors deemed indicative of faggotry, the passing of the ‘fag’ hot potato is not a difficult feat to accomplish. The result is a feedback loop of homophobic slander in which slurs and epithets bounce from one individual to the next, deepening the need for constant heteromasculine performance and queer disavowal.

I will say that as a formerly closeted queer man at an all-boys school, this practice has a profound chilling effect on those of us who are actually homosexual. I was left with such a limited range of vocabulary regarding sexuality – out of fear that the most minutely queer of statements would render me a target, or that a lack of credibility when I performed heterosexuality would invite similar suspicion – that I avoided discussing sexual matters altogether (which, ironically, led to the belief among some of my friends that I was secretly asexual). Even worse, I myself would take part in fag discourse’s reproduction, lobbing accusations of faggotry at friends or acquaintances when my own heterosexual masquerade was in question – fearful that I was only moments away from discovery, which could mean social and physical endangerment. Closeted queers may act no differently than heterosexuals under this discursive regime, becoming unwilling cogs in the homophobic machinations of the heterosexual power structure. There are few words to properly describe the
psychological horror this process dealt to my own mind and no doubt the minds of other queer youth.

However, as already indicated, fag discourse – and queer disavowal generally – functions paradoxically as both a regulation of everyday behavior and as a ‘Get Out of Jail Free’ card, as Urban Dictionary put it. Jane Ward applies Pascoe’s research to her own theory of male sexual fluidity, citing one scene in which “straight white teenage boys [are] play-acting at being ‘fags’ (by pretending to hump or kiss one another), followed by a sudden retreat from one another to express collective disgust and disidentification with the boys and men who would really do such things” (Ward, pg. 117). This use of performative disgust is fascinating because of its prevalence in all forms of heterosexual culture. Heterosexuality tends to portray “intimate contact” as “both arousing and repulsive, infused with desire and disgust” (Ward, pg. 154). This is not only the case in straight homosexual contact, but in heterosexual contact as well:

At the heart of misogyny lies the tension between heterosexual men’s ostensibly hardwired desire for women and their simultaneous contempt for women’s perceived weakness and inferiority, including the unmodified and unclean female body (e.g., women’s “nasty” body hair, “foul-smelling” vaginas, and so forth) (Ward, pg. 155).

A central feature of white masculinity is its ability to manage the paradoxes between disgust and desire, whether in the case of homo or heterosexual activity. In the case of straight men who have sex with other men, this disavowal through performative revulsion is “an act of producing heterosexual selfhood,” which “enable[s] the expression of sexual desire and the experience of sexual contact between boys while simultaneously reinforcing heterosexuality” (Ward, pg. 117).
Brian Fair articulates the continuum between misogynistic and homophobic discourse further in his essay on the masculinity of high school wrestling. Fair writes in his essay that the nature of wrestling as a sport – namely, the “intermingling” of athletic bodies in “sexually suggestive ways” and its use of “tight and revealing uniforms” – requires enhanced heteromasculine regulation (Fair, pg. 492). We might aptly draw a comparison between the maximization of heterosexual paranoia in contexts like male wrestling, and in other, less specific environments where homosocial interaction is heightened. Fair describes how high school wrestlers “achieve normative masculinity by symbolically framing sexual relations as acts of domination,” and how their “use of ‘pussy’ parallels how other adolescents typically deploy the epithet ‘fag’” (Fair, pg. 492). As one of the wrestlers puts it, “fag and pussy pretty much mean the same thing” (Fair, pg. 492). Fair calls this synthesis of homophobia and misogyny “penetration discourse,” an evolution on Pascoe’s term.

This concept of “penetration discourse” is not only useful because it helps articulate the similarity between the subjectivities of “pussies” – or women – and fags – or gay men – but because it further demonstrates how heterosexual logic divorces gay sex acts from a queer identity. If we accept the commonly held feminist notion that male sexuality is partly based in the desire to “dominate” women through sex, then we might view the blending of queer and female positionalities as a simultaneous dissolution of the barrier between acts we perceive as “straight” versus acts we perceive as “gay.” If the masculine conscious distills the queer man and the heterosexual woman down to two different sides of the same coin – that is, as two bodies waiting to be dominated by a male top – then straight men who fuck gay men
(or men perceived as gay or feminine) can write off their activity as merely domination, and therefore distance themselves from gay subjectivity. In this sense, it is the act of penetration itself – and not who you are penetrating – that denotes heterosexual identity. We will return to this concept of penetration discourse in Chapter Two, when I discuss how gay men feminize their own bodies for erotic means.

The most accurate way to understand the sex between straight white men – and the sexuality of straight men in a broader sense – is neither merely as desire nor merely as domination or repulsion, but rather as a mix of the two. The intertwining of these seemingly opposed emotions is apparent in both the homo and heterosexual sex of straight men, particularly within hazing with regard to the former (as we’ll discuss in more detail later). The presence of “power, repulsion, and disgust” are not evidence of a lack of desire or eroticism but are infused within the homosexual activity of straight white men to camouflage its sexual context (Ward, pg. 154). The “sexual track record” of straight men reveals an active tension between erotic desire and repulsion for the penetrated subject, signaling that the “sincere repulsion” of straight-identified men toward homosexual sex is no more evidence of a lack homosexual desire than their “sincere misogyny” is evidence of a lack of heterosexual desire (Ward, pg. 156).

Penetration (or fag) discourse is but one aspect of the greater phenomenon of queer disavowal, manifested in different tropes, clichés, or soundbites that Ward refers to as “sexual scripts” (Ward, pg. 98). These “scripts” are circulated through popular culture and “trickle down” into heterosexual social life, actively shaping the
individual behavior of straight men. Heterosexual scripts serve the dual purpose of “repudiating queer meanings that might be assigned to [straight male] sex practices,” and “assist in circumventing gay stigma” (Ward, pg. 98). Sexual scripts are suited toward different environments and uses, and so their form varies. However, generally speaking, Ward identifies three particular tropes that these scripts tend to rely on: necessary homosexuality, homosocial homosexuality, and accidental homosexuality (Ward, pg. 99). These tropes appear by varying degrees depending on context and frequently overlap to complete this discursive process of queer disavowal.

The first of these scripts outlined by Ward is that of “necessary homosexuality,” one of the more dominant discourses when it comes to early sexology on the sexual behavior of straight men – typically referred to as “situational” homosexuality, but also referenced as “deprivational, facultative, functional, or opportunistic” (Ward, pg. 99). These theories differentiate between what they call “obligatory” and “facultative” homosexuality: gay-identifying men are obligatory homosexuals, drawn to homosexual sex by our supposedly queer genetic code, while straight-identifying men only engage in facultative homosexuality when isolated from the opposite sex (De Cecco & Parker, pg. 12). In other words, straight men engage in homosexual behavior “only when [they have] no opportunity for heterosexual intercourse” (De Cecco & Parker, pg. 13). This script is most often deployed in contexts where men are seemingly deprived of female contact, like in prisons, the military, all-boys boarding schools, and so forth.

It doesn’t take long to disprove such theories, especially when we consider the ritualized frequency of homosexual sex in places like fraternities, where heterosexual
contact is not only present but far more frequent than for the average populace. This is not to say that context or situation are completely irrelevant, as “institutions like prisons and boarding schools provide men with ready-made heteromasculine scripts,” but to emphasize how “creative and hetero-exceptionalizing scripts are imagined, reimagined, and put to noninstitutional uses in bars and bathrooms and living rooms and all other non-constrained places where straight men choose to have sex with men” (Ward, pg. 101). While more progressive researchers adapted these theories of necessary homosexuality for modern usage, they still rely upon traditional notions of heterosexual constraint that queer theorists understand to be largely constructed and performed.

The second of these dominant scripts is “homosocial homosexuality,” which excuses homosexual contact between men as a physical manifestation of fraternal bonds. Fittingly, this script is also deployed in the context of the military, fraternities, and all-boys boarding schools. Once applied solely to the sexual experimentation of adolescents, this script expanded its authority to the lives of adults as well in recent years (Ward, pg. 107). This is the go-to script in cases of ritualized homosexuality within hazing, where forced sex acts are coupled with homophobic discourse, consumption of the abject, and promises of future brotherhood. This script also overlaps with the necessary homosexuality argument in contexts where men are both isolated from the opposite sex and pursuing homosocial bonds, like in the Navy. Under this script, straight men “can understand that the craving for sexual contact is not only natural but ‘manly,’” and “can embrace their sexual fluidity without a sense of discordance” (Ward, pg. 107).
Finally, the last primary script Ward identifies is “accidental homosexuality,” where straight men engage in gay sex while “intoxicated, dumb, or subject to other unusual conditions beyond their control” (Ward, pg. 111). This script, while perhaps less commonly deployed by straight men in reality, enjoys frequent depiction in popular media. NBC’s *30 Rock*, for instance, showed an ironic inverse of this trope when Jenna Maroney suggests that Liz Lemon dates her personal trainer who is gay, “but not when he’s drunk.” Bromance films reference this trope frequently, playing up the accidental or drunken homosexual behavior of its characters for comedic effect.

In her book *Between Men*, Eve Sedgwick theorizes the “unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual – a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted” (Sedgwick, pg. 2). This “disruption” is assisted by the use of these scripts that Ward describes, which effectively recode particular acts as heteromasculine (Ward, pg. 30). A central mechanism of this disruption is the “graphic schema” of the triangle, in which men remap their desire for each other through desire for a woman (Sedgwick, pg. 21). Sedgwick – using Heidi Hartmaan’s theory of patriarchy in terms of the relationships between men – states that “making the power relationships between men and women appear to be dependent on the power relationships between men and men, suggests that large-scale social structures are congruent with the male-male-female erotic triangles” (Sedgwick, pg. 25).

This passage opened with an excerpt from the comedic song “3-Way (The Golden Rule)” by the Lonely Island, which parodies the logic that straight men use to
disentangle MMF threesomes from a queer potentiality. Understanding the discourse of queer disavowal and its sexual scripts should help exemplify how men reinforce heterosexual identity when threatened, even in sexual circumstances where all of the participants are male. This understanding is similarly crucial for studying the ways queer men subsequently appropriate these same discourses for their own desires.

**Crossing Lines, Forging Bonds: The Settings of Straight Homosexuality**

*My manner quite effete  
Is mistaken on the street  
For a sailor who can pirouette on cue  
Well, despite your point of view  
I can thrill a girl or two  
But I’d rather get it on with you!  
—Family Guy, *The Greatest Captain of the Queen’s Navy*

As stated in the previous section, theories that posit a view of straight white men’s gay sex as “necessary” or “deprivational” do not fully account for the entirety of the phenomenon as it exists. Even reoriented adaptations of situational homosexuality fail in their conflation of all hetero gay sex as equally “constrained,” or deprived (Ward, pg. 100). However, it is important to not deny the situational aspect of sex between straight white men. While straight men can and do perform gay sex acts in a vast array of settings or social circumstances, their frequency is not static from location to location. More importantly, it is not mere accident that sex between straight men is more common in some contexts than others: in many cases, straight gay sex is built into the very cultural fabric of the institutions in which it occurs. After all, it was my own experiences at an all-boys high school that drove me to this topic in the first place, as feminist and queer theory provided me with the framework and
language needed to understand a phenomenon that I found to be so widespread and yet so invisible.

The question of where this activity is taking place also addresses to some degree how or why. Straight men who have sex in the military will not always justify their acts in the exact same terms as men in prison, or men in boarding school, or men in fraternities, and so forth. While the acts themselves may (but not always) remain relatively similar across different settings, the particular scripts that straight men use to justify their gay sex as heteromasculine must adapt to the complexities of the environment where it takes place. For instance, while a man in prison may recode his sex as straight by invoking notions of necessary homosexuality, the same line of reasoning from an individual in a fraternity would be far less convincing. Sometimes the institutional response to straight gay sex hinges upon its environment, since that environment can involve certain discursive and – as I’ll cover in the final section – racial connotations (Ward, pg. 174).

The reticulation of institutional power, homosocial desire, and context-specific sexual scripts creates the discursive and social basis for the ritualization of homosexual behavior between straight men, which often takes the form of hazing. In popular culture, hazing is one of the more recognized manifestations of sex between straight men, and – in certain groups or among certain kinds of people – it is one of most accepted. Hazing is so widespread and so ripe for analysis that one could devote an entire research project to the specificities of its practice. Hazing also serves as perhaps the most apt example of this intermingling of desire and disgust present so much in sex between straight white men. Ward herself characterizes hazing as a
“heteromasculine fetish,” which “allows men access to homosexual activity without the stigma of gay identity” (Ward, pg. 30).

As I will discuss in more detail later, hazing is predominantly found in the environments of the military and fraternities. However, not unlike the sexual scripts that perpetuate its use, hazing’s practice “trickles down” into other aspects of heterosexual life and finds prominence in other institutions. In some cases, this trickle-down effect can mean the transference of acts, language, or direct symbolism: at my high school, students elected ‘prefect’ were forced to strip and pile themselves on top of each other in a sort of 'mounting ritual,' where naked, homosexual contact was forcefully initiated to help forge the bonds of brotherhood. Besides the act itself, one departing prefect reportedly held a fraternity paddle – engraved with Greek letters – to help establish his symbolic authority, despite the fact that our school had no such fraternal institution. This symbolic reference to the influence of masculine institutions assists the integration of ritualized homosexuality into heteromasculine environments where the practice did not originate, while also providing the necessary discursive groundwork for recoding these rituals as not-gay. I call this transference of acts and discourse hand-me-down hazing, in which less influential, and typically younger masculine institutions adopt the ritualized homosexual traditions of more powerful institutions. Therefore, while we may study a particular ritual found in a military platoon, it is impossible to predict if such acts will be “handed down” to other environments, to other men who desire these homosocial bonds of brotherhood and the sex that facilitates them.
The Military

The United States military is the most influential, and therefore perhaps the most significant environment in which sex between straight white men is built into the fabric of institution’s culture. If we are to place it in an institutional food chain with regard to the theory of hand-me-down hazing, it may very well be the fountainhead. This is not to say that the military invented sex between straight white men, as Ward and other authors establish the history of such sex began long before the foundation of the United States, but rather that the military’s cultural prowess, as the heteromasculine institution, means that its traditions and practices are broadly idealized by young, straight, white men. The heroization of the military’s hypermasculine figures through popular media and the promotion of enlistment by advertisements that draw deliberate comparisons between video games – frequently played by the dejected young men targeted by military recruitment – and the supposedly action-packed thrill of military life help preserve its cultural dominance in the minds of the straight white youth today (McMahon, 2018). The cultural suggestion that it is the brutal, homosexual hazing that partly accounts for the unbridled masculine heroics of military men helps justify the transference of such acts to non-military settings.

Male sexual assault, frequently manifested as initiation or hazing, is rampant in the military. Despite the fact that more men are assaulted on a yearly basis than women, they are far less likely to report – with only one man reporting a case of assault for every four women who do (Lopez, 2016). While women also experience frequent assault in military ranks, men were far more likely to identify their assaults
as part of a hazing process. This point is key, as it demonstrates how sexual assault between straight-identifying men is actively ritualized in the form of hazing, while the sexual assault of women is not. Furthermore, the army report that divulges these statistics struggles with the same fallacies as other analyses of hazing, claiming that hazing is “more often about violence and asserting dominance, rather than sexual gratification” (Lopez, 2016). But, as already established, notions of desire and disgust or repulsion and arousal need not always be in conflict, and as is the case in hazing, they work actively in union toward the same goals.

Ward suggests that the depiction of military men in popular culture as “brave, strong, patriotic, ethical, and until very recently, heterosexual and white” (Ward, pg. 157) is contrasted by grimmer depictions of male soldiers as “callous rapists and homophobic torturers,” and that this contradictory nature exists at the core of military culture itself (Ward, pg. 158). While military rhetoric glorifies “impenetrable bodies, pristine uniforms, and spotless barracks,” it simultaneously upholds “initiation ceremonies,” involving “filthy, anal penetration, and rimming” (Ward, pg. 158).
This is the case in the Navy’s “crossing the line” ceremony, a historic tradition in which new Navy recruits – or wogs – are “beaten, yelled at, covered in garbage and filth, and made to perform denigrating tasks” (Hersh, pg. 279). Throughout the ceremony, “the initiated take the male position and the uninitiated take the female position,” frequently manifested in the form of forced crossdressing on the part of the uninitiated (Hersh, pg. 279). Sailors must endure beatings, verbal harassment, and the filling of their orifices – yes, including their anuses – with “garbage, sewage, and rotten food” (Ward, pg. 158). The ceremony similarly involves “cross-dressing, spanking, simulated ejaculation, nipple piercing, and anal penetration with objects or fingers” (Zeeland, pg. 5). The simultaneous act of forced crossdressing and forced homosexuality is itself a ritualized manifestation of Brian Fair’s penetration discourse, as femininity and homosexuality are collapsed into the same denigrated subjectivity.

While the wogs would never say so in the moment, pleasure and pain are as coupled in the crossing the line ceremony as they are in any other example of ritual hazing. Former sailors admit to the experience of “sexual excitement” in cases of sexual denigration, where wogs were fucked, dominated, and forced (though we may question to what degree these sailors are actually forced to do anything) to engage in
“gross-out contests” (Ward, pg. 162). Drawing upon our previously established notions of homosocial homosexuality, these sailors insist that “this sexual response was not gay, as it might appear in civilian contexts, but erotically charged precisely because of its association with hyper-heterosexual masculine endurance” (Ward, pg. 162). Environments like the Navy create a space for homoerotic expression for white heterosexual men who would’ve otherwise never “ventured from the straight and narrow” (Zeeland, pg. 6).

In the crossing the line ceremony and rituals like it, seemingly contradictory themes of sexual weakness and strength begin to coalesce. In hazing, “being penetrated is a marker of weakness, subordination, and lack of control,” and yet simultaneously indicates “strength, dominance, and power” (Ward, pg. 160). It is both symbolic of “infantilization” and “maturation,” both the “ultimate taboo” and “central to what it means to be a real man” (Ward, pg. 160). The blurring of the line between weakness and strength, between subordination and control, and – most importantly – between straight and gay is frequently attributed to the nature of the military. It is not merely the absence of women, but the physical estrangement from home, the separation of the soldier from the heteromasculine motherland that drives this obfuscation. However, as Ward says, this theory suggests a place in which “the distinction between ‘gay’ and ‘straight’ behavior is quite clear,” and such a place does not exist in reality.
The Fraternity

If we are imagining the heterosexual hierarchy of institutions where practices of hazing or ritualized homosexuality are transferred across different environments, we might perceive of the college fraternity as one rung beneath the crown jewel that is the United States military. Fraternities are, in a sense, an environment where young men retreat from the politically correct burdens of the now largely coeducated college scene, returning to the open, homosocial arms of the brotherhood where they might feel they belong. Even friends of mine from high school who expressed complete disinterest in fraternity life became avid participants in their early college years, drawn perhaps by some subconscious nostalgia for the days of all-male shenaniganry. Members of fraternities are always male, and mostly white, straight, and wealthy (excepting fraternities at historically black universities from this discussion).

While fraternities do not enjoy the exact same rhetorical praise as institutions like the military – which are upheld by heroic discourses surrounding national security – frequent depictions of frat life in popular film and television help consolidate its cultural influence in the minds of straight, white young men. Indeed, many of America’s highest-ranking politicians have walked frat row: Bill Clinton, the Bush dynasty, Paul Ryan, and sitting-president Donald Trump, to name a few. Some have belonged to clandestine fraternities, like Yale’s Skull and Bones Society, which requires initiate members to lie naked in a coffin and recite their sexual history to their fellow members, in exchange for the promise of “lifelong financial stability” (Sommerlad, 2018). Former members include both Bush presidents, John F.
Kennedy, John Kerry, and William F. Buckley, all powerful white men who have no doubt enjoyed a degree of financial stability throughout their careers.

However, most belong to far less secretive organizations and are seduced by less cryptic, more immediate promises: free beer, social capital, and hot women. The endurance of sexual denigration or humiliation is an institutional trade-off, where young white men must pay the price of homosexual initiation in exchange for future heterosexual gain. Because fraternities are less beholden to notions of “time-honored tradition” as the military, the form of frat hazing can take various forms (Zeeland, pg. 5). While fraternal organizations may still cite tradition in these rituals, this claim of historical relevance is easily fabricated. This was the case at my high school, where the previously mentioned mounting ritual was claimed to be a tradition dating back to the school’s founding. It only took a cursory investigation and a handful of prefect interviews for a friend of mine to determine that the ritual could’ve only be five or so years old at the absolute most.

While fraternity hazing can take various forms, it usually relies upon cultural stereotypes relating to femininity, homophobia, and masculinity (Allan, pg. 282). One manifestation of frat hazing is the notorious “elephant walk,” where pledges must strip naked, form a circle, insert one thumb in their mouth and the other in the ass of the man before him, creating a sort of shameful conga line. The pledges are to walk slowly in rotation, “linked thumb to anus, while older members of the fraternity watched and cheered” (Ward, pg. 2). Other fraternities engage in branding ceremonies, where pledges have hearts or frat-specific symbols branded onto their buttocks (Ward, pg. 3). Other rituals included “teabagging,” when fraternity member
rubs his scrotum on the mouth or face of a pledge, or the “ookie cookie,” when pledges must eat a cookie covered in the semen of their brothers (Ward, pg. 188). Like any traditions, ritualized homosexuality changes in name and substance as it is handed down from individual to individual and from institution to institution – I myself have only heard of the “ookie cookie” referred to as the “soggy biscuit.”

Hetero-homosexual behavior in fraternities can also be ubiquitous and does not always exist in the form of rituals or initiation ceremonies. The different sexual scripts that Ward established are not reserved for a ritualistic context but have application to any and all sexual activity between straight-identifying white men. Ward opens her book with an anecdote describing the contribution of a frat student in one of her undergrad courses, who submits a video depicting “a compilation of chaotic footage [the student] had shot exclusively inside the bedrooms and bathroom of his fraternity house” and “nude white boys laughing and holding down other white boys whom they mounted and ‘pretended’ to fuck on top of a bunk bed” (Ward, pg. 2). She writes that “the boys on top were laughing and calling those underneath fags; the boys on the bottom were laughing, too, and calling the aggressors fags as they struggled to… get on top” (Ward, pg. 3). Anecdotes like these demonstrate the everyday, ubiquitous nature of gay sex between straight white men and how that behavior exists naturally outside of hazing rituals, while the use of fag discourse and other scripts to divorce these acts from gay subjectivity is likely found in any example – ritualized or not.

In the fraternity setting, men have sex with other men in the pursuit of homosocial bonds or brotherhood, but cannot claim an excuse of isolation or
deprivation, as one could in the military. Straight men also engage in homoerotic hazing as a “test of strength, courage, and endurance” (Allan, pg. 283). Individual pledges rarely refuse to participate in such rituals, not only because participation is required for member-status, but because it may be used as evidence of a suspected weakness or femininity (Allan, pg. 285). What should be constant through our understanding of the military and fraternity environment, and the differences of these settings, is our conception of hazing as heteromasculine fetish, where straight men engage in gay sex acts free from homophobic stigma that they themselves perpetuate. While straight men may view these acts as a necessary rite of passage that baptizes them into a band of brothers – whether civilian or military – this is not to say that all of these men merely grit their teeth and endure the agony for the sake of masculine reward: the gay sex is itself its own reward.

The Prison

One of the more recognized sites of hetero-homosexual activity, the prison is at the center of many 20th century analyses of situational homosexuality. This literature suggests that homosexuality among inmates arises from their “desperate circumstances” and relies upon essentialist logics (Eigenberg, pg. 228). As the theory goes, these inmates enter the system, essentially ‘become gay’ for facultative purposes, and revert to their heterosexual core when returning to the outside. In other words, the gay sex that occurs in prison is nothing more than a temporary aberration and “they signal nothing particularly meaningful” about the sexuality of the participants (Ward, pg. 7).
Sexologists John Money and Carol Bohmer offer such an analysis in their research on prison masturbation and homosexuality. Both authors cite two different accounts from prisoners who describe engaging in homosexual sex after extended sentences “without a woman” (Money & Bohmer, pg. 263). One prisoner claimed to only sexualize male inmates who possessed “more [of] a woman’s physique” (Money & Bohmer, pg. 263). That same prisoner says that he “never had a guy force sex on [him]” because of the way he carried himself, his general masculine presentation. He also discusses the openly homosexual prisoners within a feminine positionality, even describing them using she and her pronouns (Money & Bohmer, pg. 263). This account of prison homosexuality provides some interesting points for discussion but still relies upon theories of hetero-homo sex as situational or facultative, while also raising questions of “the degree to which long incarceration might chronically change the imagery of a man’s erotosexual arousal,” which are potentially alarmist (Money & Bohmer, pg. 265).

While situational homosexuality is indeed yet another script that straight men call upon to recode their sex in heterosexual terms, it fails as its own theory for understanding the activity itself. If men in prison have sex with their bunkmates merely out of deprivation, then why does a similar amount of homosexual activity occur in fraternities? Furthermore, why does that activity enjoy institutional praise, while the hetero-homo activity in prisons is always coded as rape? While rape between straight men is certainly a rampant problem in male prisons, it’s worth noting that the nonconsensual sex required by fraternal or military hazing is coded as more innocent, less violent, or as necessary rites of masculine passage.
Therefore, my analysis will mainly focus on settings like the fraternity, the military, the boarding school, and anywhere else where hetero-homo activity is both institutional and sanctioned. One reason such environments enjoy this privilege is because they are predominantly white, while the prison is a symbolically-nonwhite institution. I will address the question of why I am talking specifically about the sex of straight white men, and how whiteness historically shapes discussions of male sexual fluidity in the next section.

_Everywhere, Nowhere_

Finally, sex between straight white men is not only ubiquitous within institutional contexts such as fraternities, but everywhere. Heterosexual white men may learn particular scripts or behaviors from certain environments, but their engagement in straight-gay sex is not limited to within the walls of a frat house, a military bunker, or a prison cell. Ask any queer on a gay hookup app like Grindr or Hornet: straight men not only keep looking for gay sex once they leave these environments, but they sometimes come knocking on the doors of gay men to help fulfill their desires (more on this in Chapter Three).

The semi-nostalgic desire for this behavior could be driven by larger, societal changes. As Michael Kimmel writes in his book, _Guyland:_

Men who once fond meaning and social value in their work are increasingly pushed into lower-wage service occupations; as the economy has shifted from a culture of production to a culture of consumption men experience their masculinity less as providers and protectors, and more as consumers, as ‘ornaments.’ Many men feel ‘downsized’ – both economically and emotionally; they feel smaller, less essential, less like real men (Kimmel, pg. 17).
This sense that American masculinity is “downsized,” and the general rage of straight white men at the progress made by women, queers, and racial minorities – who they blame for both cultural change and economic downturn – fuels a desire to return to the homosocial simplicity of all-male environments, to the “good ol’ days” where guys could be dudes. The entrance of women into “every single arena once completely dominated by men” leads them to believe that “the need for a ‘Band of Brothers’ [is] stronger than ever” (Kimmel, pg. 18). And so young men desire a return to the social zone Kimmel calls “Guyland,” a “pure, homosocial Eden, uncorrupted by the sober responsibilities of adulthood” (Kimmel, pg. 8). And what better way to regain the sense of belonging that these men felt when they turned from pledge to brother, or from wog to shellback, than to sit back, have a couple brews, and jerk off their fellow bros?

**High Up, Down Low: The Race of Straight Homosexuality**

This brings us finally to the relevance of race to this discussion. While I have left this conversation to the end of the chapter, racial politics are just as pertinent to this study as any of the other concepts I’ve already covered. Whiteness, and the social powers that come with it, flows constantly beneath the surface of this phenomenon. As Ward puts it, “all heterosexual practices – indeed, all sexual practices – are embedded within gendered and racialized circuits of meaning” (Ward, pg. 5). Why, then, does this project focus upon the homosexual behavior of only straight white men?

This decision is not one of neglect, but rather the exact opposite: previous studies of male sexual fluidity have focused almost exclusively on the behaviors of
black and Latino men. Latino “men-who-have-sex-with-men,” or MSMs for short, are frequent targets of research focused on HIV disclosure and contraction: these studies allege that HIV-positive MSMs infrequently disclose their status to their sexual partners, producing inherently alarmist stigma around nonwhite straight-identifying men who engage in homosexual behavior (Carballo-Diéguez et al., pg. 479). Other accounts focus specifically on black men who are “on the down-low” and on the purported medical risks of these men not disclosing their clandestine sexual activity to their heterosexual partners and families (Millett et al., pg. 52). Such accounts of black and Latino sexuality are deeply stigmatizing and contribute to the societal pathologization and medicalization of nonwhite sexual fluidity.

As some theorists have pointed out, many of these accounts are inaccurate, pathologizing, and open up the sexual behavior of nonwhite men to extensive racial stereotyping. These studies are part of the broader cultural mission of white supremacy to equate queer or discordant sexualities with blackness (Snorton, pg. 3). Concepts like the down-low or MSMs tend to enrage traditional sexologists because they resist the “forces of categorization” that are wielded by white hetero-patriarchy (Snorton, pg. 25). Therefore, the focus on sex between straight white men is not to neglect the importance of race but to demonstrate its extensive relevance and reveal how “the links between whiteness and white male sexual fluidity have been largely ignored” (Ward, pg. 6). This points to ways in which sexuality itself is a historically racial construction, where “whiteness continues to function… as a stand-in for normal sexuality” (Ward, pg. 21). Reserving our attention to the study of white male sexual behavior is therefore a radical disruption of the mainstream analytical stance which
subjects black and brown bodies to intense public scrutiny while leaving even the raunchiest of white masculine sex unnoticed beneath a smokescreen of white normalcy.

When straight white men have sex, they are able to “draw upon the resources of white privilege – an ‘invisible package of unearned assets’ – to circumvent homophobic stigma and assign heterosexual meaning to homosexual activity” (McIntosh, pg. 1). Nonwhite men, however, are not afforded such power, and their sexual fluidity “quickly falls subject to heightened surveillance and misrepresentation” (Ward, pg. 21). This racial double-standard isn’t reserved to topics of male sexual fluidity either but lies within the larger racial complex that evaluates cases involving white men as individualistic or aberrant while cases involving nonwhite men are seen as systemic and representative of their race as a whole.

Michael Kimmel identifies this double-standard:

> Often, when there’s news of young black boys behaving badly, the media takes on a “what can you expect?” attitude, failing to recognize that expecting such behavior from black men is just plain racism. But every time white boys hit the headlines, regardless of how frequently, there is an element of shock, a collective, “how could this happen? He came from such a good family!” Perhaps not identifying the parallel criminal behavior among white guys adds an additional cultural element to the equation: identification. Middle-class white families see the perpetrators as “our guys.” We know them, we are them, they cannot be like that (Kimmel, pg. 10).

While Kimmel is not speaking about male sexual fluidity, this idea is absolutely applicable to our discussion. After all, in a heteronormative society, we might view any straight-identifying man who has gay sex as “behaving badly.” But because “the power to normalize and exceptionalize one’s behavior, including one’s ‘discordant’ sex practices… is central [to whiteness]” black and Latino men who have with men
are held to the highest scrutiny of heteronormative culture, while white men continue to enjoy the full extent of their social capital, entirely unbothered (Ward, pg. 21).

Previous studies of black men on the down low and Latino MSMs have been highly critical, pathologizing, and alarmist. The historical media panic over nonwhite sexual fluidity is another chapter in a much longer history where black sexuality persists under conditions of “hypervisibility and confinement, spectacle and speculation” (Snorton, pg. 4). Conceptions of “the closet” do not carry over to such individuals, as black and Latino men lack any sort of closet from which to exit in the first place. Within this racist media landscape, nonwhite men are popular figures of blame and derision within ongoing discussions regarding “internalized homophobia, sexual repression, extreme religiosity, HIV/AIDS, the betrayal of unsuspecting wives or girlfriends, and the failure to come out of the closet” (Ward, pg. 22).

This racial critical discrepancy is observable in other contexts as well. If we return to the last section’s discussion of setting and hetero-homo activity, then we can begin to see how the presence or absence of nonwhite men in particular environments reshapes the scrutiny applied to the behavior that occurs there. As I have already stated, the setting of the prison is an inherently racialized space within the American context. This is particularly apparent when one pays attention to the pornographic depiction of prison as a setting in gay pornography. All sexual activities between men in prison are typically characterized as acts of rape committed out of sexual deprivation, calling upon historically racist perceptions of black male sexuality as discordant, uncontrollable, and violent. Conversely, the nonconsensual practice of ritualized homosexuality in the form of hazing at typically white frats or military
platoons – which is just as, if not more so violent than the type of sexual activity that occurs in prisons – is rarely if ever treated to an equal level of scrutiny. Prison, as a setting, becomes a one-word rape joke among young white boys: they joke about “dropping the soap” in their group showers, a colloquial saying that references the act of dropping a bar of soap in a prison shower and being subsequently raped by a fellow inmate while bent over. My suggestion that prison, and the colloquial phrases that reference its setting, are inherently tied to racist notions of black male sexuality is hardly a reach. If one goes to Urban Dictionary’s definition for “dropping the soap,” you can see how the term is filed under the hashtags of #rape and #blackman (Urban Dictionary, 2011).

The privileges of whiteness can also be studied intra-contextually – that is, between different scenarios within the same setting where changes in racial demographics result in a difference of scrutiny or punishment. This is exactly the case in the military, if we compare institutional reactions to the sanctioned traditions of white men, like the Navy’s crossing the line ceremony, and hazing committed in foreign, occupational contexts – like at the American embassy in Kabul. In 2009, reports of “security failings” at an American embassy detailed extensive oversights and inappropriate behavior, like “fourteen-hour shifts, chronic sleep deprivation, high staff turnover, and poor-decision making” (Ward, pg. 170). Even worse, these reports were accompanied with photographs of “deviant hazing” perpetrated by U.S. defense contractors: including “peeing on people, eating potato chips out of [buttock] cracks” and “[drinking] vodka shots out of [buttock] cracks” (Ward, pg. 170). Guards held drunken parties where participants “sometimes [fondled] each other” and those who
refused to participate were “ridiculed, humiliated, demoted, or even fired” (Ward, pg. 170).

Kabul is an interesting case not simply because of the acts committed there in 2009, but because of the institutional response to said acts. In fact, the actual hazing initiated by the guards – the excessive drinking, forced crossdressing, and consumption of food or alcohol out of the orifices of fellow soldiers – appears relatively banal when viewed in the context of other military or fraternal hazing. What makes Kabul unique is how the government responded, harshly rebuking the hazing and yet finding the white soldiers who perpetuated it blameless, attributing their lack of judgement to “little sleep, poor working conditions, and isolation from home” (Ward, pg. 172). Furthermore, reports on the hazing compared the situation in Kabul to Lord of the Flies, a novel in which “a group of young, white, upper-class British boys… are reduced to brutality and group think after their plane crashes on a deserted island during a time of war” (Ward, pg. 171). To the American State Department, these images weren’t reminiscent of any other drunken, white frat boy, but showed “the ways that harsh conditions can harden and pervert even the most normal of white boys” (Ward, pg. 171).

Despite the “nearly identical” behavior found in Kabul and the Navy’s crossing the line ceremony, the former is seen as a national security threat while the latter is “time-honored tradition,” yet another example of boys just being boys (Zeeland, pg. 5). Ward writes:

In the absence of an institutional logic to explain and justify their homosexual activity, the guards are imagined to have surrendered to their baser instincts, descended into chaos, and to have possibly lost their sanity, given their challenging workplace conditions. Without a clear circumstantial justification
for their homosexuality, a circumstance that could explain why they would act out of accordance with hetero-masculinity, the guards are imagined to have “gone wild” (Ward, pg. 175).

Without the “institutional logic” of initiation, “anal resilience,” and brotherhood, the military contractors in Kabul are without any ready-made scripts to recode their hazing as staunchly heterosexual. Additionally, the racial connotations of this setting, that “their sexual deviance takes place on foreign soil and is witnessed by Afghan men,” increases the Kabul scandal’s threats of “danger and queerness” (Ward, pg. 175). The truth of this case is that when these young, white American men engage in such seemingly depraved rituals, “they are in fact sharing something of themselves, something core to white American hetero-masculinity” (Ward, pg. 176).

This brings us to black men who are “on the down low,” or DL, and why this conception of black heterosexual fluidity is fundamentally distinct from the sex between straight white men that I am researching. The down low is one of the primary focuses of these pathologizing studies of nonwhite sexual fluidity that I am trying to subvert. Media coverage of the down low tends to depict black men as closeted or dishonest within larger social panics surrounding the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Snorton, pg. 5). While straight white frat boys are written off as just “boys being boys,” black men on the DL are interpreted as an inherent threat for stoking “[white] anxieties about the possibilities of refusing to comply with sexual identifications” (Ward, pg. 25). As a result, white scholarship on the down low produced little more than sensationalized and panicked representations of black male sexuality as inherently dangerous or dishonest (Ward, pg. 23).

How might we understand the down low in different terms from sex between straight white men, beyond their different depictions in the media? Jeffrey McCune
offers an account of the down low’s subversive potentiality in his essay, “Out” in the Club: The Down Low, Hip-Hop, and the Architexture of Black Masculinity. Here, McCune describes the down low as a liminal space in which black gay men can “re-enforce, resist, [accept] and subvert dominant modes of gender and sexuality” (McCune, pg. 309). He describes the scene in a gay black club where the use of “hip-hop heterosexist and homophobic chanting” creates a “queer zone” in which “performances of gender and sexuality are in flux” and where “men are able to be queer while also acting straight, or even straight while acting queer” (McCune, pg. 309).

According to McCune, any proper analysis of black men on the down low must reject the false dichotomy of “resistance and submission” (McCune, pg. 309). Because the hyper-surveillance of black sexuality denies the existence of a “closet” for queer black men in the first place, their refusal to publicly identify as gay and ‘come out’ is its own subversion of the white sexual regime. Then, black men on the down low are not repressed or ashamed, but proudly rejecting “the discursive demand that one must be ‘out’ to participate in gay activities,” as such a demand “ignores the fact that all gay activity does not take place in the public domain,” and that “individual participation does not always guarantee membership” (McCune, pg. 310). The down low is a practice of rejecting “the racialized and gendered conditions of visibility and invisibility” (Ward, pg. 24), while the sex of straight white men seeks to uphold these conditions and to revel in the invisibility provided by the guise of white nonidentity and sexual normalcy.
Conclusion

Sex between straight white men is all around us. It is ubiquitous, and yet its justification is contextual; as the walls around it change so do the terms used to recode the sex as heterosexual. This act of recoding is completed through the use of sexual scripts, a multifaceted array of social tropes that recast gay sex acts in heteromasculine terms. Straight white men are having gay sex because they were drunk, because they were horny and isolated from women, because they sought to forge bonds with their fellow man. These excuses are true to an extent; hazing and homosocial homosexuality do create a sense of brotherhood among their participants, though we might rightfully critique such a concept of ‘brotherhood’ in the first place. But of course, straight men are also having gay sex because they want to, but however they translate that want into masculine rhetoric varies across contexts and individuals.

To charge that sex between straight white men is wrapped up in notions of disgust and desire is not to cast doubt on the hetero-legitimacy of these men I am studying. On the contrary, the fact that these men actually engage in homosexual acts and still insist upon their straight identity – before, during, and after – does not stand in contrast to heterosexual identification but is part of what makes that identification possible. This process of disidentification does not reveal deep contradictions in the institutions we’ve discussed – the military, the fraternity, the prison – but rather the deep contradictions found in heterosexuality itself, which desires to fuck that which it also wishes to dominate and destroy (Ward, pg. 165). This project is then less about
the study of individual men and their habits then it is about the study of the
heterosexuality and its discursive regime.

In the next chapter, I will dive into how sex between straight white men is understood, depicted, and eroticized in the queer community. This discussion will largely revolve around the medium of gay pornography, where straight men – or str8 men – are an increasingly commonplace category. I will discuss how the rise of gay-for-pay actors and other straight participants in the gay porn industry further blur distinctions between queer and heterosexual worlds. I will also introduce the concept of straight realness, or hetero performativity, and discuss how not only pornography, but gay men themselves are reappropriating the sexual scripts of heterosexual men for their own erotic purposes. I hope for these discussions to help illustrate the synthesis of queer and straight life, and to beg questions of how the eroticization of heterosexuality is both a subversive and submissive erotic practice.
Chapter Two

Flipping the Script:
The Gay Eroticization of Straight White Masculinity

Introduction

“I’m a straight guy, you’re a gay guy. You want to have sex with me... I’m like the forbidden fruit.”
—Brendan McCay, How to Turn a Straight Guy

At this point, I have already demonstrated the centrality of gay sex between straight white men in adolescence through its conjunction with the institutions of private school, fraternal organizations, and the military. The previous chapter helps illustrate the prevalence of these relations in white heterosexual adolescence and culture. If we want to chart the full extent of this not-gay gay phenomenon, we must flip the lens and focus on gay men and their own culture of erotics. Interestingly enough, the most extensive depictions of sex between straight men aren’t found in raunchy frat comedies or even the grisly documentaries that aim to lift the veil, so to speak, that conceals so much Greek organizational activity. If one desires a wide array of visual media depicting this not-gay gay sex, they must look not to the heterosexuals but to the gays they other in order to encode their sex as straight in the first place. I am alluding to the seldom analyzed realm of gay pornography.

Taking even a brief look at gay porn sites, one can easily see the frequency at which straight men – or straight themes or implications – appear in gay pornographic videos of differing formats. The sociologist Jeffrey Escoffier reports that the eased circulation of gay pornography with the emergence of new technology like the VHS
resulted in the industry’s explosive success during the 1980s. The highly stigmatized and illegal production of pornography prior to the 1980s meant that gay pornographers were left to recruit performers through their previously established social connections with other gay men; including friends, casual sex partners, or boyfriends (Escoffier, pg. 535). The post-1985 era of gay pornography began to draw straight-identifying actors as well, mainly due to the industry’s tendency to pay its actors better than those in heterosexual porn. One porn director, Chi Chi Larue, suggests that sixty percent of the actors in gay pornography identify as straight. Escoffier, I think rightfully, suggests that this estimate is likely inflated (Escoffier, pg. 535). Regardless, it is certainly true that straight men – or at the absolute least, actors who claim that they are straight while on or off camera – are highly present in gay porn.

At surface value, it may seem ironic for straight men to be so present in media produced by^1^ and for gay men. It is well-established that the gay mainstream highly idealizes lean and muscular bodies: one study from the University of South Australia shows that gay men are just as likely as heterosexual women to possess a “drive for thinness,” and significantly more likely to possess a “drive for muscularity” (Yelland & Tiggemann, 2003). Many perceive of the commodified lean, athletic, or jock-like body as the “representative prototype for what constitutes manliness” (Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, pg. 283). It should follow logically that such masculinities are

---

^1^ Here, by meaning that the producers, directors, or other people who are otherwise involved in the production of gay pornography, generally tend to be gay themselves. The actors, on the other hand, are frequently straight-identifying, as is the focus of this entire chapter. For this reason, I do not include actors when I speak of gay porn being produced by and for gay men, while the actors are no doubt indelibly crucial to the production process.
eroticized by the gay pornographic industry, as these body types are largely the mainstream representation of what a successful, idealized, masculine man should look like (Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, pg. 287). A detailed analysis of how straight men – and the specific physical, situational, and discursive cues that produce their sense of str8 realness – are depicted in gay porn helps demonstrate the extent to which everyday gay men recognize the “sexual scripts” that white straight dudes deploy when justifying their homosexual activity as heterosexual (Ward, pg. 98).

For much of this chapter, I will be discussing the phenomenon of straight men in gay porn using the occasional spelling, str8. Gay porn sites, which take the center stage for much of my research on this topic, frequently use the str8 label to describe the masculine actors in their videos. This is a simple abbreviation that allows content creators and commenters alike to discuss and search for videos with ease. However, I do find it interesting that straight is so frequently written as str8, while other classifications or labels in gay pornography are left unabbreviated. The distillation of straight men into the pornographic tag str8 is paired with certain clothing, staging of scenery, sexual discourse or “dirty talk,” and body language that marks and legitimizes these subjects as straight to gay viewers. Labeling videos or pornographic subjects as str8 without this legitimizing performativity will usually result in unimpressed viewers who aggressively question the straightness of the men depicted, lashing out in the Pornhub comments sections, as I will review later.

These acts of straight performativity point to the perception of heterosexual men in the gay mindset not only as individuals but as a concept. Elizabeth Grosz describes concepts as “complex [heterogeneities],” as both “endoconsistencies” and
“exoconsistencies,” and most importantly as the “incorporeal or virtual, even though… ‘effectuated’ through bodies and events” (Grosz, pg. 98). In many cases, concepts are themselves made up of other concepts: just as heterosexuality is based upon the concept of masculinity, and vice versa (Grosz, pg. 98). Grosz elaborates:

The concept cannot be identified with discourse or representation, with proposition or statements. These are some of the common modes of analysis of concepts, modes of submitting them to truth or to intension, but concepts themselves, while representable, are not reducible to discourse or representation, for they are modes of resonance or vibration, modes of connection or disconnection, “movable bridges” between other concepts and, above all, to events (Grosz, pg. 99).

While I may suggest that particular tropes are representative of straightness, it is crucial to remember that heterosexuality is its own concept and is therefore irreducible to an itemized list of representations. Heterosexuality is not then a conglomeration of certain clothing, mannerisms, or fashion, but is a loose union of similar “resonances” or “vibrations” that suggest an aura of masculinity, of straightness. In this sense, even the most mundane of acts can be said to denote a certain degree of straightness, or lack thereof. Activities like walking your dog, washing your hair, or pulling money from an ATM can be performed in ways that are suggestive of varying degrees of straightness or queerness, completed by both the conscious and subconscious adherence to minute bodily and social performances, or vibrations.

Straight men, or str8 men, are then not only individuals with an attraction to the opposite sex, but representatives of a state of being, a way of acting and holding yourself, both in and out of sexual relations; these are all virtual or incorporeal aspects of identitarian performance that are manifested or associated with particular physical characteristics while simultaneously existing conceptually as independent
from the bodies where they manifest. Str8 men become multifaceted objects of hate, repulsion, envy, and desire. Their depictions in gay pornography are messy, sexy, and hotly debated by gays and straights alike.

As various feminist and queer theorists have stated, pornography can have very real effects on the psyche of its viewers. Gay pornography has an arguably even greater potential for this effect because of its deep, historical connections to the gay public (Mowlabocus, 2011). In this chapter, I will argue that the eroticization of heterosexual men – from their bodies to the discourse they use in the bedroom – has very real effects on how gay men perceive themselves and others. The production of narrative, amateur, and ‘gonzo’ pornography that eroticizes the sex of straight white men prompts the rise of a new sexual phenomenon for queer men: heterosexual performativity, or the adherence to straight realness, for erotic purposes. While straight white men use different situations and discourse to justify their sex as heteromasculine, gay men in turn adapt these very discourses for queer erotic means. Gay (and straight!) men are not only acting straight on camera, but are bringing hetero performativity into the bedroom, simultaneously subverting and adhering to idealizations of hetero-masculinity in their everyday sex lives. Before I can embark on this analysis, I must first demonstrate the importance of gay pornography to the gay community and how its depictions are so central to queer male discourse.

You Are What You Watch: The Influence of Pornography in Gay Culture

We live in an age where pornography is becoming increasingly accessible if not unavoidable. The rise of internet pornography and streaming sites like Pornhub,
xVideos, and YouPorn makes pornographic content easier to distribute and consume than its ever been. As of 2017, different reports estimate that the America’s porn industry is worth $97 billion, garnering an audience of at least 4.8 billion people a day\(^2\). Being any sort of porn consumer, whether straight or gay, is to be witness to compulsory heterosexuality, even if left unnoticed by the heterosexual public. At the end of the day, no matter how much of my data Google sells that indicates me as a “gay consumer,” when I blanketly search for “porn,” it’s not queer content that appears. Even sites like PornHub that host hundreds of thousands of gay pornographic videos try their best to conceal this content from unsuspecting straight (male) viewers, lest they shatter the façade of heterosexual hegemony.

However, when one does find their way into the expansive realm of gay pornography, whether intentionally or otherwise, they enter a world where gay sex is – for once – the norm. PornHub’s “categories” tab gives way to a new gay typology, split between labels like “twinks,” “bears,” and so on. As Sharif Mowlabocus says in his lecture on gay representation, the production of gay pornography as “the only space in which gay sexual relationships are validated… and seen as normal” means the industry possesses a deeply influential relationship with gay cultural imagery. He elaborates:

While straight male culture has a vast array of resources on which to draw when constructing and maintaining identities, gay men growing up and developing a sense of self within a world that positions them as other, and never just a man, rely more on [pornographic] representations. (Mowlabocus, 2011)

\(^2\) The reports on the profits of the gay porn industry are far less specific, if they even exist, and I am left admittedly unsure whether this projection of an industry worth $97 billion includes the market value of gay pornography at all.
In other words, heterosexual men have a greater deal of room in which to create and validate their sense of self. The “vast array” of representations that heterosexual men possess extends far beyond the realm of the porn industry, which means representations in straight porn are likely to be less influential on the individual minds of the straight consumer. This isn’t to argue that straight men are unaffected by depictions in heterosexual porn, as plenty of feminist work indicates that this is decidedly not the case, but it does demonstrate that the work of separating the pornographic from the real is a potentially easier process for straight men than gay men.

The gay community’s relationship to pornography doesn’t merely exist out of necessity. Living in a homophobic society that tries its best to prevent any depictions of homosexual sex in the mainstream means the production of work that explicitly depicts these acts is inherently subversive to hetero-patriarchy. Pornography’s connection to the liberatory activism of the gay rights movements comes partially from a time in the United States when the government “didn’t differentiate between homosexual rights manifestos, gay erotica, or dirty pictures. All were considered illegal, and using the postal service to distribute any of them could and did result in long prison sentences” (Stabile, 2015). Whether pornographic or not, depictions of gay male love – however raunchy – are part of the gay community’s fight for visibility against heteronormative society. The pornographers themselves seem aware

---

3 When I differentiate between “the pornographic” and “the real,” I am speaking of the supposed difference between those acts or situations that are depicted in pornography and the events that occur in everyday life. The barrier between the two worlds of fictional pornography and that which we consider “real life” sex or romance is increasingly porous. Therefore, the differentiation between the pornographic and the real is intended to demonstrate the ways in which these are generally indistinct.
of the inherent political nature of their work, donating substantial funds to gay rights organizations. Mark Stabile argues in the Huffington Post that gay porn historically provided rural gays – who are isolated from the urban centers where gay communities are typically most defined – with a much needed release from the compulsory heterosexuality of American life: “For tens of thousands of closeted customers in small towns across the country, those Falcon films were the ‘It Gets Better’ videos of their day” (Stabile, 2015). My analysis and critique of gay pornography orbits a central conflict between the form’s reliance on “phallocentric, male-supremacist, sadistic, [and] homophobic conventions” and its queer, revolutionary potential (Moorman, pg. 161).

What, then, is the result of the gay community’s attachment to pornography? According to Mowlabocus, “pornography is written into the code of gay men’s everyday lives,” actively sculpting “understandings of the self and other in increasingly powerful ways” (Mowlabocus, pg. 61). One result is the gay community’s compulsive drive to categorize its members. I am not speaking here of the sexual categories of “top” and “bottom,” which are necessary enough that I can defend their usage⁴ when divorced from their gendered or homophobic implications. Instead, I am referring to the widely adopted categories of twink, bear, jock⁵, otter, chub, cub, and so on. This is not only a taxonomy that’s come to dominant gay sociality but a major point of fascination by heterosexuals, who frequently ask me with glee to differentiate between the twink and the twunk, the otter and the bear.

---

⁴ I am speaking here of a literal usage when navigating explicitly sexual situations between two or more gay men.
⁵ In many ways, the jock gay subtype is another way of categorizing those men who conform to an eroticized vision of straight-acting white masculinity.
am, however, rarely up to the task: first, because of my lack of interest in explaining the specificities of queer life to the delight of fascinated heterosexuals; and second, because I barely understand these categories more than they do.

The almost monolithic acceptance and usage of pornographic categories by gay men points to the self-pornification of the community. While straight men categorize themselves through their attraction – for instance, “ass men” versus “tits men” – gay men categorize themselves through their own appearance and potential for consumption, rather than through their desire (Mowlabocus, 2011). This points to how gay men are subjected even within their own respective community. Overall, the central role of gay porn historically in queer liberation movements and its active categorization of gay identity underscores why we must understand pornography and gay society “[not as] singular concepts but rather as a constellation of diverse and divergent forms that are loosely grouped together in what are often unstable and highly subjective categories” (Mowlabocus, pg. 61).

---

6 It should come as no surprise that someone who is authoring a paper arguing that men who have sex with other men can indeed be heterosexual is uncomfortable clearly defining when one is a twink, a bear, an otter, or a hunk; but this doesn’t mean that the gay pornographic taxonomy isn’t worth analyzing.

7 There are obviously gay men that do not comfortably or enthusiastically categorize themselves with this taxonomy, as I am indeed one of these gays. However, I would argue that if only within the nebulously defined sphere of “Western” gay culture, most if not all gay men have at least a cursory understanding of these different gay subtypes.
Performing Straightness: Genres of Heterosexuality in Gay Porn

The gay taxonomical pantheon is joined by another perhaps unexpected category: straight men. On PornHub, the “straight” tag has thousands of hits and “straight guys” is featured on the site’s category menu, complete with an image of a young, tattooed white boy receiving oral sex from another guy, his expression suggesting the encounter is somehow accidental (fig. 1). The str8 boy trope is so common that even rare viewers of gay porn are likely to have witnessed it. This is hardly a new phenomenon, as even early works of vintage gay erotica are known to play on heteroerotic environments and situations in which str8 guys experiment or are otherwise drawn to gay sex through a seemingly insurmountable curiosity.

In some cases, the performance doesn’t end when the cameras stop rolling: many gay porn stars maintain straight identities on and off set. The concept of gay-4-pay pornography has been a rather well known one in the mainstream for some time and a frequent target of those critics who promote what Jane Ward calls the “born-this-way” hypothesis (Ward, pg. 86). America’s confounded obsession with gay-4-pay propelled some of its actors to mainstream recognition, with straight-identifying actors Vadim Black and Sean of Sean Cody (no relation) appearing on MTV’s Real Life. In fact, the gay porn news site The Sword even published in 2015: “Who’s Gay, 8

---

8 This is not to suggest “performance” in the sense that these actors are lying or merely performing a role on and off camera, just as gay-identifying actors sometimes play straight-identifying characters in narrative pornography, but rather to point to the ways in which straightness is performed by everyone, porn star or not, gay and straight.
Who’s Straight, and Who’s in Between in Gay Porn: The 2015 Definitive List.”

Reading the list, I was struck by two different points: first, the number of porn stars whose work I had admired and whom I previously assumed were gay or bisexual but were straight-identifying; and second, the fact that in discussing gay porn, there is a need for such a “definitive list” in the first place. I discussed in Chapter One how the contradictory nature of sex between straight white men signals the inherent contradictions found in heterosexuality, and we might make similar claims here: gayness or queerness are themselves marked by their own persistent contradictions, where queer and straight men cohabitate the same digital and physical spaces, their constant proximity blurring the distinctions between the pornographic and the real, between what is straight and what is gay (Ward, pg. 165). These straight-identifying actors have cut themselves a large slice of the gay porn pie, one that reaches beyond the specific realm of gay-4-pay performances. It is worth stating in bolder terms: straight men are nearly as present in gay pornography as gay men.

The emergence of online pornography diversifies methods of determining supply-and-demand in the industry; the proliferation of data allows pornographers to serve more niche or precise interests in the consumer base than ever before (Brennan, 2018). Such a change in the industry produces more varied depictions of heterosexuality in gay porn, which seek to fulfill different desires through divergent performances of straight white masculinity. By categorizing these emergent genres, we can understand the nuances of how different approaches to the pornographic medium rely on different appropriations of heteromasculine discourse and
mannerisms. I use three general categories to differentiate these varied performances: narrative porn, amateur porn, and gonzo porn.

_Narrative Porn_

The first of these categories is _narrative porn_, which I generally define as pornography produced by a studio with a clearly defined script which makes minimal, if any attempts, at performing _straight realness_. In many ways, narrative pornography is the base format from which all other formats diverge. Gay narrative porn’s structure is largely borrowed from heterosexual porn, and in some aspects it is fundamentally identical to heterosexual pornography besides the specificity of the bodies depicted and the tropes upon which the film builds its script. These videos are filmed just like narrative straight porn: steady cameras, multiple angles, studio editing, even complete with titles and credits. Despite the construction of a script that centers white heterosexual masculinity, there is no genuine attempt to claim that the acts depicted are in any way real\(^9\) beyond the literal penetration you’re watching unfold on screen. From start to finish, the viewer is aware that they are watching a fictionalized scenario and the producers never try to suggest otherwise. The teachers, the coaches, the prison guards, and the step-brothers are all presented as paid actors. We understand that the scenarios are fictionalized for the same reason we understand any film or television show is fictionalized. The films of _Next Door Studios_ serve as

---

\(^9\) This lack of effort in performing straight realness is complicated by the presence of straight-identifying actors in narrative pornography, who will sometimes play characters that aren’t necessarily straight-acting.
an apt example of this narrative format, as their videos are professionally shot and edited, thoroughly scripted, and are even paired with a music score and opening credits that title the scenes.

Narrative porn helps reveal the specific scripts that straight men use to justify their sex with other men, and how gay men re-appropriate these scripts for erotic purposes. All of the environments where we have learned to find sex between straight white men – the military, the frat, the prison, the dorm room, and so on – are found in narrative porn. The importance of setting in gay narrative porn could be interpreted as an eroticization of “situational homosexuality,” the idea that sex between straight men “hinge[d] on its temporal and spatial isolation to prison cells and military barracks where women were presumably inaccessible” (Ward, pg. 100). Settings like the fraternity are similarly eroticized by “gonzo pornography,” which I define below, because it allows the producers to create a set that imbues the scene with heterosexual implications without having to construct an actual story or script to go with it.

The theory of situational homosexuality is underpinned by the idea that “the hydraulic force of male sexuality” requires “release by whatever means necessary” (Ward, pg. 100). As Ward elaborates, situational homosexuality is not only observable in cases of “material constraint,” like that of the prisoner or the solider, but in cases of performative restraint, or “the staging of situations in which straight men ostensibly have little choice but to engage in homosexual encounters” (Ward, pg. 101). Such performative restraint is visible in narrative porn where the str8 characters complain of bitchy girlfriends and annoying wives, who nag and nag but never go down on their deliciously masculine husbands. The pain of three months of celibacy
is too great and these men ultimately have no choice but to defy their sexual
collection.

We must pause here to note the inherent misogyny in such depictions. Women
are generally absent from gay pornography, but when they are present they exist
typically as an erotic obstacle, yet another straight hang-up that the queer character –
with whom we identify as queer viewers – must overcome in his pursuit of str8 bait.
The “Wet Blanket Wife,” as the website TV Tropes defines it, is an incredibly
commonplace cliché in television, film, and – in our case – pornography, not always
but frequently denoting that the straight marriage or relationship is an unhappy one,
as evidenced by the Wet Blanket Wife’s constant bickering and complaining (TV
Tropes). In gay porn, the Wet Blanket Wife is faulted not only for her bitchiness but
for her prudishness, her refusal to perform any and every sex act that the boyfriend
desires. Sometimes it’s the straight guy who raises this complaint, telling his closeted
bro, his roommate, or his step-brother how he hasn’t had sex in weeks, or how she
refuses to go down on him, or so forth. In other cases, it’s the gay character (if there is
even technically a gay character featured in the plot) who raises these complaints,
perhaps taunting his straight buddy with the fact that he’s “never fucked an ass
before.” This erotic, misogynistic cliché is now its own sub-genre of the narrative
form, what I call distraction porn, in which two men are having sex while in the same
house or even the same room as the girlfriend or wife. They giggle and tiptoe around
the house, fucking and sucking behind kitchen counters and half-closed doors, the
straight guy’s dumb, nagging wife completely oblivious to the fact that her husband is
cheating on her, and sometimes right in front of her own face!
Like situational homosexuality, the homosociality script is similarly present in narrative porn. Eroticizing the “bonds of men” is most apparent in gonzo pornography depicting frat orgies or hazing rituals, which we’ll discuss in more detail later (Ward, pg. 107). However, the cultural understanding of the sexual nature of fraternal pledging means that this kind of scene spills over into various genres of gay porn, including narrative studio porn. For example, in *Bubble Butt Pledge* from Next Door Studios, a young freshman is forced to clean an older frat brother’s house while wearing nothing but a jock strap. He’s insulted, ordered around, and addressed as *pledge* and *boy*, two terms that have become so prevalent in gay sub-dom culture. (I don’t think I need to tell you who ends up bottoming.) In other videos, the understanding that what is about to occur is just between us dudes – and, more specifically, that your prudish girlfriend or Wet Blanket Wife will never find out – is part of the bond that inscribes the act of heterosexual, and that is subsequently eroticized. The eroticization of male bonds is then partly based in a shared misogynistic disdain for women: the straight man hates his girlfriend for her shrill nagging, and the gay man hates her for getting in the way of his sexual prospects.

In some cases, the specific scenarios in narrative porn strike intersections between the different heterosexual justifications for homosexual contact. In *Injured Straight Friend* from StraightKinda.com, a helpless straight boy with two broken hands is left unable to pee, shower, and jerk himself off. When his roommate is forced to help his injured str8 buddy clean himself, an erection ensues, and the following exchange takes place:

**Guy #1:** Listen, hey uh, this might sound a little weird or kinda gay, but could you… could you like, keep going? I just need to fucking cum really bad, man.
I haven’t been able to do it myself… I’d really appreciate it, man. I mean, nothing weird or anything, you’d just be really helping me out.

**Guy #2:** You know what, why not? You need it, I’m here for it.

**Guy #1:** I just wish I had a big-titty girl to come here and suck my dick, you know what I mean?

This homosocial notion of gay sex as “helping out” your friend, teammate, or frat brother is a common one. The case of Guy #1, who is unable to cum because of his broken hands, is clearly an example of a material restraint, thus producing the situation in which it’s acceptable, and not-gay or weird, for him to engage in sex with another man. Meanwhile, Guy #2 has no injuries or material restraints to keep him from cumming, but he is drawn to the service of Guy #1 because they’re bros and that’s what bros do.

As Jane Ward observes when studying the *Casual Encounters* section of Craigslist:

> The ads assert that being straight or gay is not about the biological sex of participants, but about how the sex is done – the language that will be used (before, during, and after sex), the type of pornography that will be viewed, the types of alcohol and drugs consumed, and the agreed-upon reasons for the sex itself (Ward, pg. 129).

Ward illustrates how the staging of pornographic scenes, rather than the genitalia or sexual identity of the actors, can imbue narratives with a sense of eroticized straight realness. Alcohol, drugs, and the general notion of horny drunkenness are frequently featured in gay narrative porn. *Dirty Step-Brother* from Next Door Studios similarly capitalizes on the presence of heterosexual porn as a straight signifier: two str8 dudes – one of which is played by Tom Faulk, who has indicated previously that he identifies as straight¹⁰ – are watching heterosexual porn and jerking off, keeping...
enough distance between the two to code the encounter as straight. That is, until they are joined by another character played by Gabriel Cross, who joins their fun but shows visible interest in penises other than his own; a signifier of that character’s queer intentions. When Gabriel begins seamlessly jerking off and blowing the two men, Tom comments, “Yeah, I may have forgotten to mention that my step-brother is also gay.” This seemingly innocent act of male bonding or helping-a-dude-out is tainted by the queer invader, who engages in gay sex with a degree of sincerity – or a lack of queer disavowal – that actually straight men would never express. This erotic trope of gay men entering straight spaces and delighting in their homosocial homosexuality is a frequent undercurrent of the eroticization of straight-acting white masculinity.

Despite the diversity of scenarios eroticized in narrative porn, one frequently deployed trope is the performance of homophobic repulsion, not unlike the repulsion performed by actual straight-identifying men in military hazing rituals (Ward, pg. 49). While Jane Ward discusses the performance of this repulsion in gay hazing porn, and how its eroticization “illuminates a more harmonious relationship between hetero-masculine repulsion and homosexual desire,” these or less exaggerated circumstances also exist within more traditional narrative porn (Ward, pg. 49). Here, I am referring specifically to a performative gesture found in various thumbnails from Str8 to Gay, a porn site with narratives focusing specifically on the eroticization of gay men “turning” or “converting” straight dudes to homosexual lifestyles. I have come to call this specific display the “woah, bro” pose (fig. 2), because it non-verbally

———

makes me comfortable enough in categorizing him as such, since this notion of “using a man” is a frequent site for the gay eroticization of straight (or, heteroflexible) men.
demonstrates a performative homophobic repulsion – though admittedly one far less pronounced than the performances found in hazing gonzo porn – and is usually accompanied by claims to the character’s heterosexuality, that he has a girlfriend, and so on.

In the porn I’ve researched, the most popular narrative porn that depicts straight men having gay sex is hyperaware of the same intricacies as these men on Craigslist, because it’s ultimately these very intricacies that produce some participants as heterosexual and others as gay. Narrative porn’s centralization of the script in its performances makes it easier for them to actively demonstrate the straightness of its characters through the usage of terms like “bro,” and of course the direct assertion of its characters’ heterosexuality. This means that the performativity of straightness in narrative porn is primarily, but not merely, achieved through discourse, while amateur and gonzo porn rely more heavily on body types, settings, and mannerisms.
Figure 2

Examples of the “woah, bro” pose. Thumbnails taken from Str8toGay.com.
Amateur Porn

The next section of my typology is *amateur porn*, a category which exploded in popularity with the recent growth of online pornography. Roughly defined, amateur pornography is porn performed by non-professionals, who in many cases are unpaid as the scenes are merely the recordings of casual sexual encounters. Amateur porn can include anything from a Snapchat video to the increasingly lucrative world of cam pornography: it is arguably the most expansive and diverse of the subsections, as the proliferation of recording devices contributes to the collapse of the boundary between the real and the pornographic. The newfound popularity of sites like OnlyFans, where professional porn stars upload amateur content in exchange for a subscription fee, dissolve this barrier even further. The division between professional studio porn and amateur porn is not as stark as it once was, meaning the line between *’pornographic’* bodies and *’real’* bodies is similarly undefined.

Sites like PornHub are now more than mere hosting platforms for professionally produced narrative pornography; now everyday consumers can make accounts and join an intricate social network with millions of other porn viewers and content creators. Included in this new capability of networking is the ability of everyday users to contribute their own personal content, appearing seamlessly alongside videos produced by well-funded studios. Nowadays, when I peruse the “most viewed” videos of the month on PornHub, I am just as likely – if not more so – to see amateur content as I am professional content. Amateur pornography’s inclusive definition means that its substance can take vastly different forms. In some ways, no
amateur video is the same, while so much of narrative pornography feels almost cookie-cutter in its production.

The study of straight themes in gay amateur pornography is useful for several reasons. First of all, if we believe the creators who are telling us we are watching the sexual relations of straight men, the proliferation of amateur videos that eroticize straightness are certainly an indication of the active role that straight men play within everyday gay sexual culture, if the presence of straight or ‘curious’ boys on Grindr weren’t enough evidence (more on this in Chapter Three). Even if we adopt the belief that every single video on PornHub that claims to be depicting one or more straight men is nothing but a lie to garner views, their prominence still demonstrates the popularity of such eroticization, even when feigned.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, amateur porn depicting str8 dudes is evidence of the ways, beyond narrative disclosure, in which straight realness can be performed. Amateur videos that claim the straight tag use different strategies to create a sense of straightness through the staging of scenery, particular objects, or specific sexual mannerisms. In many of these videos, the bodies of those depicted – their fit, muscular physique, and their athletic, masc clothing – are themselves heterosexual signifiers.
In one video, the title claims that we’re watching two straight frat brothers fuck in a hotel room (fig. 3). But how does the video demonstrate their straightness? There’s no narrative, no active plot or setup that situates these two frat dudes as on vacation, isolated from their girlfriends and in need of sexual release. And, like other amateur videos, the scene is only two minutes in length. However, the scene has other present factors that act as a legitimizing force to this claim of heterosexuality: the two white bros indeed possess masculine, athletic builds, and more importantly, their clothing – specifically their wearing of athletic socks and sneakers during the act – are also signifiers of a straight-acting masculinity. The table beside the couch they fuck on sports a bottle of Jack Daniels, a red solo cup, and an energy drink: three objects that summon associations to straight frat culture and similarly draw upon the notions of drunken, accidental homosexuality that are eroticized on Craigslist (Ward, pg. 111). I am not suggesting that any viewer, myself included, watches such a video and consciously thinks, “oh, a beer bottle, they must be actually straight.” Instead, I am referring to the ways in which amateur porn helps code straightness in ways that are far subtler than that of narrative pornography. Straightness is signaled through scenery, body type, and clothing.
Gonzo Porn

This brings us to gonzo porn, which is perhaps the most confusing category of the three I’ve defined. Gonzo pornography is studio porn, just like narrative porn, but that pursues an amateurish aesthetic. I adopt the term gonzo from Joseph Brennan, who wrote about the use of “gonzo techniques,” in the studios Fraternity X and Sketchy Sex to “invite a fantasy that what is being shown is really happening” (Brennan, pg. 386). By “gonzo techniques” or “amateurish aesthetics,” I am alluding to the usage of certain modes of production, like shaky hand cameras and minimal editing, that suggest to the viewer that the acts depicted are real and unstaged. Unlike amateur porn, the videos that make up gonzo pornography are the result of studio production, but they are distinct from narrative pornography in that they actively pursue the construction of an “illusion of authenticity” (Brennan, pg. 388).

While Brennan is largely defining gonzo according to the specific techniques used in filming – a fair distinction as the word itself is derived from the history of hand camera porn as gonzo – I am focused less specifically on camerawork and more on the ways in which the studio attempts to sell its depicted acts, and by association the straightness of its subjects, as real. In some cases, the commitment to heterosexual performativity goes beyond filming. As Brennan elaborates:

From its launch Fraternity X was committed to the claim that what appeared on its site were the recorded exploits of ‘drunken frat boys’ from an actual fraternity. A search through Wayback Machine’s archive reveals that initially the site named a specific university at which the fraternity was supposedly based. The opening sentence of the ‘About Our Frat’ page once read: ‘We are an official Fraternity at Arizona State University just outside of Phoenix, Arizona’. From the February 10th, 2014 [page] this changed to ‘a University in Arizona’, although reference to ‘ASU’ remains unedited in descriptions for certain videos. It is unclear what prompted the change, but the gesture of naming a specific university, an actual place, for more two years shows the
commitment Fraternity X has to its claim to be hosting content that is in some way real. This example also shows that in porn which utilizes gonzo techniques, the parameters of reality and fantasy are under constant testing and change. (Brennan, pg. 389)

This excerpt demonstrates how gonzo porn commits to far more than camera techniques in its mission to perform straight realness. Fraternity X – and other studios of a similar nature – know that they must go the extra mile if they’re going to accurately perform straightness, especially in a porn market where they must compete with amateur videos where our lack of information and the unspoken aesthetics of straight-acting masculinity more effectively create an “illusion of authenticity” than narrative porn.

This commitment to realness is also visible in the site descriptions of other studios that similarly eroticize the not-gay gay sex of straight white frat boys. The studio Haze Him describes their mission as the following:

Welcome to Haze Him, the official site for straight college fraternity guys getting hazed into gay sex. This is just how the cookie crumbles on Haze Him. You get your pledges to do gay sex acts and we give you a chance to win $10,000 cash… The crazier the video, the better your chances at winning. So what are you waiting for? Watch and enjoy real frat boys sucking and fucking cock. (Ward, pg. 177)

The interweaving of straight narratives centered around frat hazing with the infrastructure of these sites is a phenomenon unique to these gonzo studios. Ultimately, the attempt of these sites to sell themselves to consumers as “contests” where “real frat bros” can submit their actual videos of gay hazing is only possible because the gay viewership understands that these acts do in fact happen within the fraternity environment. The real-life existence of these acts, and that gay men have knowledge of their existence, is needed in order to make this eroticization possible in the first place (Ward, pg. 178).
Of course, this extra level of effort would be worthless if the meta-performativity\textsuperscript{11} weren’t paired with the social scripts that both gays and straights alike understand as the key ingredient to coding these particular subjects as heterosexual while even committing homosexual acts. “Flaccid penises, expressions of disgusts and repulsion, homophobic outburst, beer-chugging, and tits-and-ass-obsessed dudes all lend creditability to the films” (Ward, pg. 179). If we are to understand the ‘woah, bro’ pose of narrative porn as a sort of camp heterosexual performativity, then Fraternity X and Haze Him are committed to the gritty, visceral realness; “they cringe, they look away, they squirm uncomfortably… they appear paralyzed with fear, nauseous, sometimes on the verge of tears” (Ward, pg. 179). The sheer level of action and noise summoned by a scene of screaming white men, their homosexual orgy intercut with homophobic epithets, creates an overwhelming cacophony of sexual violence. I myself have never been able to watch such videos in their entirety, as the depictions of fraternal ritualized abuse commit to such a deep, brutal realism that I at times begin to wonder if what I am watching actually happened, even though I know for a fact that these are staged, produced performances. This type of performance is rarely (if ever) found in narrative porn, ironically even in videos where the actors themselves claim to be heterosexual offset.

Other sites like Sketchy Sex make a less deliberate effort in performing straightness in this fashion, instead “exploiting bareback and anonymous sex discourses” (Brennan, pg. 394). Sketchy Sex, not unlike some amateur porn under the

\textsuperscript{12} By “meta-performativity,” I mean unseen performance off-camera, and the inherent suggestion of these sites that the sex were a watching is only one video taken from an entire underground frat world of straight gay sex. Meta-performativity infuses certain heteromasculine settings with queer meaning by its suggestion that the acts we are watching are environmentally ubiquitous.
“straight guys” tag on PornHub, makes no direct claims at straightness. Instead, Sketchy Sex is more engaged in the general eroticization of the jock, an archetype that in my mind has come to occupy a similar, if not identical mental positionality to that of the str8 dude. One could argue that Sketchy Sex’s claim that they are distributing “homemade videos of real-life sex addicts,” is evidence that the site is making no attempts at performing straightness (Brennan, pg. 394). However, I would argue that the studio’s eroticization of hypermasculine discourse, muscular white ‘jocks,’ and the filthy, crowded “crash pads” where the videos are filmed locates these films at least on the periphery of this straight-acting masculine fetish.

As Ward stresses, the existence – and relative popularity – of sites like Haze Him, Sketchy Sex, and Fraternity X point to a “growing demand for eroticized representations of the nexus of homophobic repulsion and homosexual sex” (Ward, pg. 181). Specifically, it is a growing demand for a greater level of commitment to capturing straight realness in porn; a level of commitment that has almost as much to do with what happens on camera – in terms of plot, setting, acting, and more – as it does with what happens off camera – in terms of what the site claims to be, ‘in reality,’ and how the performers themselves claim to identify sexually. Even narrative porn is moving beyond plots focused on seducing heterosexual men and is actively incorporating straight-identifying actors into its production, adding a degree of straight meta-performativity to an otherwise obvious piece of erotic fiction.

Furthermore, the added level of violence and repulsion adds to the erotics of “homosexual degradation,” or, “the moment when the seemingly innocent white straight boy is subjected to the most naughty of gay sex acts” (Ward, pg. 183). By
depicting homophobic repulsion throughout, these videos not only succeed in establishing a more brutally realistic example of straight performativity, but bring an additional, sadistic element of eroticism to the gay male viewer: we are allowed to delight in footage of straight men as they cry and gag their way through sex acts that gay men have been ridiculed for engaging in our whole lives. This is a level of eroticization that narrative porn simply cannot engage in by nature of its conception, since “[gonzo porn] gives a far more nuanced treatment to heterosexual masculinity than is typical of gay porn, as it shows straight men to be both dominant and submissive, powerful and weak” (Ward, pg. 184). Because gonzo porn intends to “eroticize normative hetero-masculinity,” and specifically those “male bonding rituals that enable intimate contact between men in heteronormative environments,” there is constant need for a greater display of homophobic repulsion than what is even possible to accurately depict in narrative porn (Ward, pg. 185). The ‘woah, bro’ pose is simply not enough to bring a sense of straight realness to environments like college fraternities which gay men understand, through both media, hearsay, and experience, as violently heteronormative.

Detectives of Heterosexuality: Discourse and Debate in PornHub’s Comment Section

The popularity of straight men in gay porn in all of its forms – narrative, amateur, and gonzo – should not be interpreted as the suggestion that all gay men love and accept this growing phenomenon. As Jane Ward has said both in Not Gay and in interviews about her research, the harshest critiques of those men who fuck other men and call themselves heterosexual come from within the gay community.
Their presence in gay porn is no different, and this should come as no surprise. Gay porn, as I’ve stated, is for many queers the only space in which they enter and expect to see gay men and gay sex, without exception. Therefore, the increasing presence of straight men in gay porn feels to many like invasion more so than eroticization, as the one space where gay men used to have an obvious monopoly is now, against all possible logic, somehow populated by heterosexuals. The reaction of many gays seems to be one of rage, as thoroughly expressed in the comment sections of articles, blogs, and pornography that touches this subject.

Here’s how four different commenters on the previously mentioned article from *The Sword* that gave a “definitive list” of 2015’s top gay porn stars and their claimed sexual identities expressed their anger:

This is basically [bullshit]. No straight man will ever have sex another man. When you have gay sex, it’s either you’re gay or bi.

A straight guy that does gay porn? That’s like a vegan who eats KFC everyday…

If they are doing bisexual or gay porn where they have sex with men then they’re either bisexual or gay. No guy that’s actually hetero/straight would or has done gay porn, and it’s all just marketing that these men are ‘straight’ since in reality you do not make a lot of money from being in porn.

I’m surprised everyone here doesn’t identify as straight. That seems to be the order of the day in gay porn these days, right? Suck a guy’s cock, eat his ass, lick his balls, have him bust a nut in your frigging eye and swallow his cum… but no… it’s just a job and you have a girlfriend. These gay-4-pay people are pissing me the fuck off. I wanna watch gay or bi men fucking, the alleged straight ones can go.

All of these comments express an essentializing, alarmist fear that the increasing presence of straight men in queer digital spaces is resulting in the dilution or displacement of the queer community. I am most interested in this final comment from *The Sword*: initially, because it displays a familiarity with what he calls the
“order of the day” in modern gay porn, but more importantly because I can sympathize with his anger. I can sympathize with all of their anger, to some extent. Living your life as a gay man meant that you required a careful understanding of the ways in which other gays presented themselves to the world. Without an almost scientific knowledge of these sexual or gendered performances, and the lingo that comes with them, gay men risk exposing themselves to heterosexuals. But the rules of the game are starting to make less and less sense to some gay men. Fashion and mannerisms once considered undeniably feminine or gay have come to dominate the mainstream. The New York Times claims we are in the age of the twink. And now, gay men are told that these men who are having hardcore, raunchy sex on camera are, in reality, straight? It is, at the absolute least, confusing.

These critiques are not limited to the comment section of The Sword. If you scroll down to the comments of any gay porn that claims to feature straight men, you are more likely than not to find one or two comments – if not an extensive debate between different commenters of varied ideological positions – that raise doubts about the real straightness of the video’s participants. Their comments provide useful insight into gay men’s grievances with the eroticization of straight men, while other comments provide equally useful insight into the ways in which gay men justify this eroticization. All the while, the occasional comment from a viewer who at least purports to be heterosexual provides insight to their own justifications for their gay activity; justifications that are, more often than not, in line with the scripts detailed by Ward.
In the comment section of one amateur video – entitled, *My Straight Friend Load and Cum Inside* – I was surprised (and delighted) to find that a vast array of different commenters were engaging in a rather extensive debate about the authenticity of the video’s claim that the recorded participants were straight. The debate appeared to be launched by one particular exchange, which I’ve reproduced here in its entirety including spelling and grammatical errors:

*tiemeandfuckme:* I don’t understand the guys who can fuck a guy like this and still be like “no homo” admit your gay or bi

*assfck545:* I agree. It really reminds me of the time in my early stages of being gay and low-keying liking guys, but try to save face by claiming I was still “straight” even if I did get turned on by the image of guys fucking. I understand perfectly if there are others who just like having sexual intercourse regardless of genders, but I feel just referring to yourself as “Gay” or “Bi” makes things less complicated.

*DAA1994:* I would totally accept the idea of one straight guy beating the hell out of a dude’s asshole and then saying “I’m not gay” okay, that’s correct. Because he’s not putting ‘Romance’ let’s say there is no love implication but he’s seeking for filling a hole with cum, only

Here, we can see interesting and even convincing points made by both sides. Most gay men had a time in their life when we claimed we were straight while knowing, in reality, that we were actually gay. Therefore, it’s a relatively logical assumption for any gay man to make that these straight boys who are fucking men, particularly those who are recording that fucking and posting it on PornHub, are telling a similar lie.

However, I doubt any of us gays who went through a closet period were fucking men, recording it, posting online, and claiming simultaneously – and in the video itself – that we were heterosexual, though I can only speak from personal experience. This point, I think, shows the limitations of this line of argument.

What I’m admittedly more interested in are the points made by DAA1994, who argues that the men in the video – and, by association, any straight-identifying
guys that engage in such acts – could still be heterosexual. This seemingly impossible contradiction is made possible by, as DAA1994 puts it, the lack of a “love implication” between these two men. If you are “seeking for filling a hole with cum, only” by DAA1994’s logic, then you could still fuck a dude and be straight because you lack the “sincerity” of “authentic gayness” that heterosexual men must constantly “inoculate themselves against” (Ward, pg. 102).

Still, the debate continues:

*biinpg: He aint straight
AJPsilocybin: all these deniers. You’re not straight if you fuck a guy. accept it
stunfisk420*: im not attracted to men but ill destroy their holes if need be

First, the essentialist language used by AJPsilocybin, paired with his matter-of-fact ‘accept it’ kicker, is somewhat representative of the language used by most detractors in these comment sections. They are of the same school of thought as those queer critics that Ward describes, who insist that gay subjectivity is determined at birth, not by environment or socialization. Their adherence to “sociobiological theories of sexual orientation… swelled the ranks of complacent neoliberal subjects” and led to the abandonment of the queer community’s more “revolutionary projects” (Ward, pg. 199). Those viewers who seemed determined to expose the true gayness of those porn actors who dare describe themselves as straight do so with a discourse reminiscent of condemnation; as if queerness is as much a sentencing as it is an active identity held by an individual.

---

12 Interestingly, I did some light investigative work and studied the personal profile of this commentator – and other commentators who express a straight identity – and found that he does indeed classify himself as a straight man in his info. Furthermore, his favorited videos are all of heterosexual pornography – though I do realize in typing this that I myself have become one of the so-called *detectives of heterosexuality* I describe in this chapter.
The rebuttal by stunfisk420, that he’s straight but will “destroy [men’s] holes if need be,” is fascinating in its own regard. In many ways, his comment justifies straightness in the same way as other heterosexual commenters:

**joesphgomes619:** I fucked some boipussies and I aint gay lol. Some straight guys just need a hole to dump cum, girls aren’t as easy unless you pay for hookers.

Two completely different commenters, and yet they justify the heterosexuality of men who fuck other men in almost identical terms. First of all, his use of *boipussies* helps illustrate how straight men deploy penetration discourse to justify homosexual behavior – and how the somewhat frequent usage of this term by gay-identifying men is evidence of how gays subsequently eroticize this discourse (Fair, pg. 492).

Furthermore, the usury phrasing that both men deploy reminds me of a quote from one of the gay-4-pay actors interviewed by MTV’s *Real Life*:

> I’ve never had feelings for a guy, never been sexually attracted to a guy. When I’m having sex with a guy, they could be anything from vegetables to fruit to car tailpipes. Whatever you’re into. Fucking a guy is like a fucking a watermelon.

It’s worth stating that this usury language is not necessarily upsetting to the gay men it dehumanizes. ‘*Using holes,*’ and variations on the erotic phrase, is scattered across gay PornHub, frequently – but not exclusively – in videos that also claim to depict straight men. This suggestion that fucking a gay man is like “fucking a watermelon” is intentionally dehumanizing, as to prevent engagement with that “sincerity” that heterosexuals identify with genuine queerness. After all, how could you be gay if you’re really only fucking car tailpipes and vegetables? Additionally, the notion of “destroying… holes *if need be*” is both latent with sexual violence and suggestive of *desperation*, as if the straight top has no choice but to fuck the gay bottom, like they
are doing their duty (Ward, pg. 101). The response of the gay men who eroticize this behavior is not to decry the heterosexual deployment of homophobic dehumanization, but to allow themselves to be used and to thank these straight tops for doing their duty.

One comment that particularly grabbed my attention during this research was one that took an arguably more nuanced perspective to the debate unfolding in the comments:

**NYGayGuy:** I know from experience that guys who identify as straight and otherwise fuck girls can play with a guy on occasion, but I think commenters here who question his being str8 are right this time. With the bottom bent over and so close to him face-to-face for most of this... well, that’s not what a straight guy usually wants. A bit too intimate.

This comment interests me because its author does not wholeheartedly dismiss the idea that a straight man can, in any circumstance, have sex with a man and still be straight. As he writes, his own experience shows that this is not the case. But, he tells us, this specific display of hetero-homo activity *is* worthy of doubt. And why? Because its participants fail to accurately perform straight realness: the boys are fucking face-to-face, and clearly such a position is far too intimate for any *actually* straight man to take part in it. Here, we can see that NYGayGuy, and other commentators of his stripe, has become a *detective of heterosexuality*. He possesses such a complex understanding of straight men, their not-gay sex, and the way they recode that sex as not-gay, that he believes he can differentiate those fake heterosexuals from *genuine* heterosexuals based off of their performance of straight-acting white masculinity. We can speculate if a difference in staging or in setting would earn a more generous appraisal from NYGayGuy and experts like him.

Comments such as this help illustrate the importance of performing straight realness,
as a failure to do so will result in critiques from other detectives of heterosexual who are so confident in their ability to separate the true heterosexuals from the fakers and the faggots.

**Conclusion: Hetero Performativity in Critical Perspective**

One of the focal points of this discussion of gay pornography and its eroticization of sex between straight white men is the introduction of a particular performative concept: *hetero performativity*. When I refer to ‘straight realness’ in this chapter, I am referring to a particular measure of hetero performativity in a broader context. The use of *realness* in this sense deliberately calls upon notions of performativity in queer drag culture, which I use to situate this concept in a larger, analytical context in Chapter Three.

While this chapter devotes its focus to gay pornographic iconography, this is not to say that hetero performativity only exists in that realm. Hetero performativity, like the performance of any sexuality or gender, can be an everyday phenomenon. However, whether depicted in pornography or not, I do understand it in specifically queer, sexual terms: for instance, falsely performing masculinity or heterosexuality in a context for, say, the purposes of a joke or even, in a darker sense, for the purposes of protecting one’s own well-being in violently heteronormative environments, is not what I’m describing when I speak of hetero performativity. Instead, I am talking about temporal, quintessentially *erotic* performances of heteromasculine mannerisms, discourse, and physical appearances for the purposes of *contrasting* that performance with engagement in homosexual acts. For instance, roleplaying as an experimenting
heterosexual is an instance of hetero performativity; as is fucking in the presence of particular heteromasculine signifiers, such as the wearing of athletic gear like football pads. These acts of performativity eroticize the sex of straight white men, while simultaneously parodying that which classifies the sex as heterosexual, and thereby calling attention to the ways in which heterosexuality is a socially constructed identity.

We should not underestimate the power of this erotic performance. Extensive appropriation of certain discourse, mannerisms, or clothing through hetero performativity has noticeable effects on mainstream culture. Take, for instance, the jockstrap: originally nothing more than an athletic undergarment, its hypervisibility and appropriation by gay men and gay pornography transferred its understanding in dominant culture to that of a gay fetish item. When I searched jockstraps online for the purposes of this argument, every major website I found depicted them in a semi-pornographic light. In fact, I became admittedly aware of how many of these different brands I had seen previously in gay pornography depicting – or featuring – straight men! Hetero performativity is then not only a queer erotic strategy for gay men in our personal lives but is our own radical disruption of mainstream culture. By deploying hetero performativity, gay men can take that which is implicitly heterosexual and infuse it with queer erotic meanings. This is not a power to be overlooked.
Chapter Three

Straightened Out:
Heteromasculine Idealization in the Queer Community

Introduction

“Do you know how long it takes to turn a straight man? Weeks, months, even years! You have to hone in on one specifically, become his best friend for that entire time. You have to be his number one person: when he calls you have to answer, when he texts you have to reply, when he says, ‘come over, help me pay my bills,’ you have to be there, when he wants money you have to give him that money. You have to do anything for him. And then, when you catch him crying on the phone, you have to be like, ‘do you want me to come over?’ And then you have to get over there, ASAP. It’ll be raining, it’ll be dark in his apartment. You’ll see his eyes across the room, and then... you’ll know: this is the time you pounce on him, like you’re two animals out in Africa. You have to remove any evidence that you’re a man yourself. But like I said, I don’t have time! I have work at four o’clock.”

—Michael Henry, How to Turn a Straight Guy

The homosexual behavior of straight white men is not always isolated from queer worlds or individuals. In many cases, heterosexuals seek help from gay men to fulfill their nostalgia for a homoerotic adolescence, or just to explore previously repressed queer desire. Finding a gay man whose had such an experience isn’t a very difficult task: those who haven’t slept with a straight guy are in fact in the minority of gay men who I know personally. Some queer men actively pursue experiences with straight men, following the erotic blueprint produced by gay pornography. Others are merely propositioned by straight men in particular environments where that behavior is more likely, like in boarding schools or the military. Whatever the specifics, these experiences always cement the same point: sex between gay men and straight men doesn’t just happen, it’s positively regular. As one of my friends once ironically put it, “my favorite gay guys are the ones who are straight.”
Not unlike sex between straight-identifying white men, sex between straight and gay men occurs in different environments and for different reasons. In some cases, the presence of a queer-identifying man changes the discursive content of the encounter and the straight participant will use different scripts accordingly. I recall from my high school days, when one friend of mine remarked: “I heard it’s not gay to let a gay guy suck your dick.” Here, it is not merely the fact that you’re engaging in sexual contact with a gay man, but that you code your actions as passive; I am letting a gay man perform oral sex on me, as if it were charity. Furthermore, we might wonder where exactly my friend heard such a concept? Somewhere, somehow, straight men are passing down the secrets of their heteromasculine scripts by word of mouth, an oral history of homoerotic masculinity.

The gay men who pursue ‘str8 bait’ can occupy different queer positionalities in that pursuit. Some gay men take on a usury, submissive sexual role, feminizing their body parts in service of their straight tops. Such an approach is depicted frequently in amateur gay pornography, where gay men recode their anuses as “boy pussies,” or “bussies,” or just as “pussies.” Other men deploy hetero performativity to portray themselves as ‘bros,’ using a performed, common masculinity to seduce their straight partners. And still other men seek to “turn” straight men, to subject them to a queer, submissive positionality, producing an erotic contrast between the hetero-masculinity of the straight guy and his femininized sexual role.

Overall, there is a relatively high degree of familiarity among gay men when it comes to the “not-gay” homosexual experimentation of masculine straight men. Not only do queer men understand that there are sexual roles to be played, but they
understand exactly how to play them. The consumption of gay pornography that
depicts heterosexual men has more than just a subconscious effect on the queer
psyche: pornographic narratives serve as guiding lights for gay men in their real-life
pursuit of str8 bait. In fact, we might question to what degree the straight men in these
cases are guided by the exact same narratives!

For some gay men, sex with straight-identifying dudes isn’t just a caveat of
their sexual life: it actively queers otherwise heteronormative environments. The
internet is littered with accounts from different individuals who describe a litany of
queer experiences across different heteromasculine settings such as boarding schools,
the military, and so on. For the straight men who engage in that behavior, these acts
are recoded as heteromasculine, but for any closeted gays in their midst – those
‘queer invaders’ that heteronormativity fears – those experiences are just as queer and
just as erotic as any other homosexual activity, if not more so. Homosexual sex may
be pervasive in hypermasculine, all-male environments while remaining in line with
heteronormativity, but this recoding does not stop gay-identifying participants or
witnesses from mining this behavior for queer desire and eroticism.

The idea that gay and straight men are constantly existing, living, and having
sex in entirely different spaces is a lie. Heterosexuals and homosexuals are not from
different worlds, but sometimes witness, perform, and inhabit one another’s
relationship to queer sex (Ward, pg. 185). I am then not only speaking of the
homosexual sex that straight men engage in, nor am I speaking only of how that sex
is depicted in gay pornography. Instead, this chapter focuses on the ways in which
straight-identifying men are active participants in queer worlds. I do not mean
necessarily public spaces – for instance, a gay bar, not that a straight-identifying person couldn’t go to such a place in pursuit of homosexual experience – but their frequent presence in queer digital spaces, as in gay hookup apps like Grindr or Hornet and other places that facilitate anonymous queer sex with varying degrees of discretion, like Craigslist’s Casual Encounters page. In these spaces, the line between straight and gay is so indistinct that it effectively stops existing.

This final chapter will then argue that straight men are not merely a queer fetish, but their own gay archetype, not entirely unlike the previously mentioned pornographic categories of bears, twinks, and so forth. I will engage in an analysis of sexual advertisements posted on the Casual Encounters section of Craigslist – where straight men frequently proposition gay men for casual, discreet, not-gay sex – to help illustrate the sexual interplay of queer and heterosexual worlds and the discourse straight men use to traverse those worlds while maintaining heteromasculine credibility.

I will then analyze gay social apps like Grindr to delineate their extensive cultural influence in the gay community. I argue that these apps provide unheard-of erotic opportunities for their users, yet simultaneously act as discursive tools of self-regulation – as neoliberal romantic marketplaces – in which an individual’s inability to live up to white, heteromasculine idealizations results in a join-or-die mentality: gay men capable of reaching these ideals begin to actively regulate themselves to fit an idealized image of straight-passing white masculinity, while those queers who are unable to make such a transformation have their bodies and identities disregarded. I want to suggest that the engagement of straight men in queer digital spaces, and the
ways in which these spaces idealize straight hetero-masculinity, have led to the emergence of the straight man as yet another queer, erotic archetype embodied by heterosexual men themselves and by the gay men who perform straightness on an everyday basis. This phenomenon is neither wholly submissive nor subversive; it is a process of erotic, cultural assimilation in which the supposedly antithetical worlds of queer and heterosexual life spill into each other.

It is the simultaneous queering of straightness, and the straightening of queerness.

Keeping It Casual: Straight White Men Seeking Same on Craigslist

In her book, Jane Ward describes the phenomenon of “ads written by people claiming to be straight white men seeking sex with other straight white men” (Ward, pg. 127). She describes these ads as “elaborate, often describing sexual scenes with a dazzling level of detail,” complete with their own “hetero-authenticating details, from homophobic disavowals of gay men, to misogynistic references to violence against women” (Ward, pg. 128). I’ve included some examples of these ads from her research below:

**Straight Dude Drunk and Horny. . . . Any str8 bud wanna jack?—27:** Here’s the deal. Went out drinking and clubbing, thought I’d hook up with a chick, but didn’t pan out. I’m buzzed, horny, checking out porn. Is there any other straight dude out there who would be into jacking while watching porn? . . . I’d rather hook up with a chick, but none of the CL [Craigslist] chicks ever work out.

**What happened to the cool bi/str8 dude circle jerks?—33:** What happened to a group of masc[uline] dudes just sitting around stroking, watching a game, drinking some brews, jerking, showing off, swapping college stories, maybe playing a drinking game and see what comes up?
**STR8 Drunk Dude Looking to Get Off**: Hi there, Looking to lay back, have some beers, etc. and watch some STR8 porn this evening. I’m 5.10, brown hair, brown eyes white dude.

**$300 Bucks Cash If You’re STR8 & Goodlooking!!—27.** Hey, are you str8, good-looking and broke? Are you Under 30 and hella cool? Like watching porn and talking bout pussy? You’re in luck. 300 bucks every time we hangout. Be under 30.Honestly STR8. I’m mostly str8, great looking chill bro.

All of these posts rehearse the scripts that I outlined in both of the previous chapters. These “mostly str8” dudes are not looking for sex with other straight guys for sincere, queer reasons that motivate actually gay men to pursue gay sex, but because they are drunk, nostalgic, seeking homosocial bonds, and isolated from women. While these men may “rather hook up with a chick,” their drunken male libido gives them no choice but to seek out some not-gay sex with a fellow straight white dude.

Many of the hypermasculine, detailed scenarios described in these posts are not unlike the plots found in gay pornography depicting straight men. The presence of “heteromasculine props” like “beer, sports,” the citation of sexual scripts, or the ritualistic tradition of watching straight pornography are the same signifiers that narrative, amateur, and gonzo pornography use to inscribe their gay sex with heterosexual meaning – the key difference being that said sex is produced for the erotic pleasure of a queer viewership (Ward, pg. 128). We could not even accurately differentiate the scenarios on Craigslist from the scenarios found in gay pornography by the personal identification of their participants, as the latter are frequently acted out by men who are themselves straight-identifying in real life! The notion that these acts are less about gay sex or desire and more so about guys being dudes, the physical manifestation of being “free to be a man,” is both ironicized and eroticized by queer men on and offline (Ward, pg. 131). I myself have watched an innumerable amount
of gay pornographic films in which these exact scenarios – where men drink, watch straight porn, and talk about pussy – act as setups to what is an otherwise standard, erotic display of homosexual activity.

If we situate these accounts within the conversation of hetero performativity raised in the last chapter, a new question emerges: are these men truly straight-identifying, or are they gay men performing straightness and merely staging the situations in which such men do actually have gay sex, for their own queer purposes?

At first glance, this may seem to betray a central thesis of this project, that the men we are studying are truly heterosexual, and that their engagement in gay sex and disavowal of the queer identity is part of what constitutes that heterosexuality (Ward, pg. 28). This was, and is still, the case. However, my understanding that queer men do – with some frequency – perform hetero-masculinity in sexual scenarios as a form of subversive erotic roleplay does cause me to raise my eyebrow at some of these posts. After all, if you’re a lean or athletic masculine white man who is gay and eroticizes sex with straight men, there is little stopping you from going to a website like Craigslist, crafting a scenario, and waiting patiently for a straight respondent.

While I make this point to help demonstrate the ways in which these erotic digital spaces are cohabitated by straight and queer men – and that this cohabitation partially dissolves those distinctions that separate straights and queers in the first place – this is not to claim that the majority, or even a very sizable portion of, these posts are written by queer men who are performing straight-passing white masculinity. Like Ward, I agree that many of these posts are written by truly heterosexual men for the same theoretical reasons I agree that most of men I am
studying, in general, are genuinely straight. What is more interesting to me in this case is not necessarily the sexuality of those who author these posts, but the sexuality of those who answer them.

This is because Craigslist is its own trope in gay pornography’s eroticization of straight men. Recently, I stumbled upon a vast array of videos where Craigslist is cited as its own erotic site, not entirely unlike the way in which other videos locate themselves in frats or dorms for an added element of queer, heterosexual meaning. Since “Craigslist,” as a location, isn’t specific enough to be staged, the video that invoke it are all exclusively amateur pornography, giving them an inherent level of narrative credibility that other forms lack. Like any other porn featuring str8 guys, these videos are interspersed with the same “heteromasculine props” and discourse that contextualizes one or more of the participants as straight. In one example, after receiving oral sex from his supposedly gay sub, he asks: “How does my girlfriend taste?” In other videos, the clothing of those who answered Craigslist ads for an anonymous, makeshift gloryhole were used as evidence of their straightness. One commenter on PornHub somewhat ironically claimed that the young, white college bro must’ve been straight because his sweater was so ugly, and a gay man – even a closeted one – would not be caught dead in such an outfit.

Gay men are seemingly posting their own propositions on Craigslist. While I don’t have research on how these posts are worded, or if these queer bottoms (they are, notably, always bottoms) claim to be straight men themselves, I do have the pornographic evidence posted on PornHub of what purports to be footage of horny, str8 dudes anonymously fucking gay men. These videos usually follow similar
staging. They take place in hotel rooms or apartments and begin with footage of our queer protagonist bent over – his head in a pillow or his eyes blindfolded – before our ruggedly masculine straight white boy enters the room and gets to work. Many of these videos lack any sort of dialogue: the men appear, they fuck, and they leave; all completely silent besides the occasional grunt or moan. Notably, this lack of dialogue acts as its own discourse, as it signals a lack of romantic interest that denotes a deprived, orgasm-oriented straight identity. They aren’t queer men looking to prolong their homosexual experience, but straight men looking merely for a hole to cum into.

You may be wondering: why believe these amateur pornographers who claim that their anonymous Craigslist tops are heterosexual? But the point of this section has never been to claim that these men who post on Craigslist, the men who answer said ads, or the men who record this activity as gay pornography and post the footage to PornHub, are certainly gay or certainly queer. On the contrary, the point of this chapter is not to unravel or do away with this lack of clarity, but to critically analyze it. It’s the interplay of these different worlds – where straight white men have sex with other straight men, where queer men eroticize that sex and the straight men who commit it, and where those queer men then subsequently perform that straightness for their own erotic purposes – that lends itself to a general ambiguity, an inability to neatly differentiate between that which is queer and that which is straight.

Before concluding this section, I want to recognize that the recent passage of SESTA-FOSTA in the United States Senate led to the subsequent removal of Craigslist’s Casual Encounter forum, condemned for its supposed association to sex work. In their essay Sex in Public, Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner note how the
closing of Christopher Street – a neighborhood in New York that sported various adult business where gay men would congregate for public sexual purposes – is itself a legislative regulation of sexual activity (Berlant & Warner, pg. 551). As I watched this Craigslist pornography, I noted how various commenters lamented with nostalgic remorse at the removal of such a space, where digital anonymity and sexual ambiguity gave way to new, erotic possibilities. We might understand the regulation and removal of such spaces as a renewed crusade against these queer sexual publics, one justified by a broader attack on the rights of sex workers in America. For many commenters, there appears to be a sense of betrayal or lost opportunity, now that this unique, bizarre online world in which straightness and queerness combined is a thing of the past.

On the Market: Neoliberal Romanticism and Grindr

While we may mourn its removal, Craigslist is certainly not the only digital space in which queer and straight worlds meet. Indeed, the most popular and influential of these spaces is Grindr, the gay hook-up app that is of much popular debate and yet seldom analyzed. Grindr is not the only app of its kind but it is the most popular, sporting millions of active users and raking in untold revenue through its seamless interweaving of sexual facilitation and consumerist advertising. I find it difficult to explain to my non-gay male friends and family the true extent of Grindr’s influence. As Benjamin Haber writes in his coverage of Grindr:

GPS-enabled apps like Grindr turn the landscape itself into a conduit for erotic circulation, with the people you encounter or the neighborhood or bar you’re in priming you to open your preferred app for digital intimacy. The
unconscious fusion of the vibrations and sounds of your phone and the open-ended potentiality of connection across distance preps your body before even encountering a message (Haber, pg. 92).

In all its negatives and positives, Grindr is an incredibly powerful tool. When I open Grindr in a new place, it does more than provide the potential for a future hook-up: it actively remaps the very landscape of my environment, translating previously meaningless apartment buildings or street corners into sites of queer potentiality; its own challenge to heteronormativity, it somewhat radically asserts the presence of gay (and straight!) men who may be ‘looking’ in your area, shattering the façade of a society that would have us assume its implicit straightness. Even its iconic, telltale ping is enough to send one into a queer headspace, as the sound activates “erotic memory and projected fantasy” (Haber, pg. 103). Its influence is all but inescapable, especially for non-urban environments, where “Grindr is the de facto gay town square, at least for non-monogamous men” (Haber, pg. 92).

And yet, Grindr is hardly an app of queer celebration. There is a general “cultural consensus” in the gay community that Grindr is “a risky world of bigotry, meanness, and waste” (Haber, pg. 93). Other, more alarmist accounts in popular media describe Grindr as a “rolling horror show of rape, murder, superficiality, and time wasting” (Haber, pg. 97). Grindr users are so frequently offended and mistreated via their usage of the app that they pursue an online “catharsis,” where queer internet memes or posts describe “loneliness,” the “danger of visuality,” or emphasize the “brutal racism, meanness and impossible body standards that the visuality of Grindr seems to encourage” (Haber, pg. 115). And still, Grindr itself can be an addiction: its users, myself and many of my friends included, frequently delete the app in an act of
Braveheart-esque refusal before returning only weeks, days, sometimes only hours later, our respective tails between our legs. As Haber puts it, “leaving Grindr is better described as a process than as an act,” and it’s a process very few of us seem successful in completing (Haber, pg. 93).

Users like me usually return to the cold, digital embrace of apps like Grindr out of a “cruel optimism,” as our desire for the “possibility of the potential pleasure of connection” is “quickly… short-circuited into disappointment” (Haber, pg. 93). Even worse, the growing consensus that Grindr is simply a bad place for bad people shames those of us who are trapped in its sphere of influence, “as an object of widespread criticism becomes habitual and then viral, the critical thrust shifts from itself to its bad users” (Haber, pg. 97). But queer people, young queer people in particular, can hardly be blamed for our connection with such digital spaces, as our “relationship between online and off” is historically “symbiotic” (Haber, pg. 102). Indeed, Grindr is its own realm where gay men can sometimes safely “perform” our identities (Haber, pg. 103).

Perhaps our continued addiction to the platform is why Grindr’s CEO, Joel Simkhai, appears ambivalent, or even actively proud, in the face of harsh criticism. Haber fairly characterizes Simkhai’s many responses to these criticisms as “unrepentant” (Haber, pg. 114). Simkhai is of the belief that Grindr’s constant ability to make its users feel unworthy, invalidated, is in fact as positive, as it drove him to “get fit,” “go to the gym more,” and “get better abs” (Haber, pg. 114). According to Simkhai, men are “visual creatures,” and therefore an app in which we pick and choose other men based purely off a handful of photos and list detailing our weight,
body type, and height should be right up our alley. His most telling defense of Grindr comes in response to the accusation that Grindr is “superficial and reduces gay men to physical ideals”:

Fantastic! I love it. Absolutely. Look good. I’m very proud if Grindr has forced us to up up our game. To brush our teeth. Comb our hair. Eat right. Go to the gym. Be a healthy person. Cut back on the smoking. Cut back on the bad things and look your best. We’re men. We visualize. We see before we hear, before we think, before we do anything else. That’s how we are. I haven’t changed that. That’s what our evolution has taught us to do. I certainly go to the gym more because of Grindr. I’m competing with the guy a space away from me on that grid (Haber, pg. 114).

Simkhai’s statement is particularly ripe for my line of analysis. Grindr’s reduction of gay men to our “physical ideals” is not an unfortunate result of the how the app functions, but a gift from Simkhai himself, as the app forces queers “to up our game” (Haber, pg. 114). To Simkhai, “upping our game” means brushing our teeth, coming our hair, eating right, working out, and so forth. Racism, homophobia, or fatphobia on Grindr are just more incentive for us to “cut back on the bad things” (Haber, pg. 114).

There is plenty to unpack here, but what Simkhai leaves most glaringly unaddressed is the fact that many are physically unable to live up to the white, straight-passing, heteromasculine idealizations of Grindr. For many queer men, no level of eating well or working out will change certain immutable facts of their body or identity (including, crucially, how they are racialized) denying them access to the straight-passing white masculine ideal that determines who is and is not deserving of attention or respect in these digital zones.

There is a certain cadence to Simkhai’s language that I wish to highlight, one echoing the language and rhetoric found in contemporary neoliberalism. In the above quote, Simkhai argues the Grindr pushes us to “up our game” and “evolve” because
we are “competing with the guy a space away from me on that grid” (Haber, pg. 114). In this limited sense, he is absolutely right: Grindr forces its users into a sexual/romantic battle royale, where the conventional attractiveness of the boy-next-door could mean a denial of untold queer experiences. Just as neoliberal ideology tells us that competition and market-based solutions will produce higher profits, higher wages, and more productive workers, we are told by Simkhai that our constant competition with those adjacent to us on Grindr’s digital grid will result in our own production as hotter, fitter, more productive gays. This dynamic is demonstrated further by Simkhai’s literal characterization of Grindr as a “venue” and a “marketplace” (Haber, pg. 124). And he’s right: as a venue or marketplace, Grindr certainly did not invent the straight-passing, heteromasculine ideal that’s so prevalent among queer men. However, it does serve as method of dissemination and as a space in which gay men enter, are invalidated, and must either “compete” for a greater adherence to heteromasculine norms or simply leave, dejected and unsatisfied.

I call this new approach to the modern dissatisfaction with idealized superficiality neoliberal romanticism, denoting the ways in which individuals like Simkhai view competition and assimilation – not confrontation or subversion of the norms themselves – as our best path to queer sexual success. In this view, it is only by our personal work ethic and competitive mindset that we can find happiness in an increasingly homogenized gay mainstream. Recognition of Grindr’s influence and neoliberal romanticism should help guide our understanding of how Grindr actively regulates and promotes “self-pornification” and adherence to an idealized model of straight-passing white masculinity.
Just Your Average ‘Straight’ Gay: Grindr, Self-Pornification, and Hetero Assimilation

While perusing Grindr on my own time, I stumbled upon the profile of one user who more or less fit the idealized mold I try to describe in the previous section: white, athletic and muscular, his style and posture indicative of straight-acting or straight-passing masculinity. To my analytical delight, I swiped upwards on his profile to reveal the following bio:

I like volleyball, soccer, and basketball. So I guess I’m you’re average ‘straight’ gay. [laughing emoji]

This Grindr user is doing more than subconsciously adhering to the norms of straight-acting white masculinity; he is actively aware of his own positionality, even proudly marking himself as one of those “straight gays.” In fact, this is more than just self-awareness: his particular usage of *average* suggests a familiarity with this type of non-queer queer. This user is not one of the straight white men we discussed in Chapter One, nor is he one of those queers who may appropriate heterosexual performance for personal erotic purposes. Indeed, this user is doing something with hetero performativity we might rightly criticize as dangerous, as non-productive, as anti-queer: his eroticization of straightness, his pornographic idealization of white masculinity, translate into an everyday pornification of the self, and into his own reclassification as a ‘straight’ gay. We are witnessing one of the risks of these spaces, where the blurring of the line between hetero and queer leads to something else we are yet to discuss: not necessarily hetero performativity, but hetero *assimilation.*
In Chapter Two, I discussed the ways in which the performance of heterosexuality by gay men in both pornographic and personal contexts is at times a subversive practice, in which the pleasurable transference across sexual-cultural worlds produces an erotic dissonance: queer men extract pleasure from the appropriation of straight-acting masculinity by contrasting said appropriation with homosexual acts, an act of erotic roleplay that calls attention to the construction and performativity of heterosexual masculinity. In the previous section of this chapter, I demonstrated how the influence of apps like Grindr, their existence as tools of corporeal regulation, and romantic neoliberalism’s production of a join-or-die ultimatum actively promotes adherence to straight-passing white masculinity, while rendering other, less normative bodies as essentially invisible in these digital spaces.

What results from the application of hetero performativity to gay social apps like Grindr? Ironically, it is the production of a grid that appears eerily similar to the very heteromasculine environments we covered in Chapter One: homogenously white, seemingly heterosexual, and decidedly masculine. The multiplicative potentiality of the queer, digital sphere is all but entirely lost. What emerges in its place is a display of “remarkably similar bodies,” ones unsurprisingly similar to the straight white boys found in the military and the frat, in the Navy and in gay pornographic films (Mowlabocus, pg. 68). We are not only speaking of body types in this sense; mannerisms are themselves coded in an eroticized, white heteromasculinity. They enact what we might call the Grindr pose: a simple way of performing “a specific masculinity, namely the ‘straight-acting’ or ‘regular’ masculinity often found within the narratives of gay porn” (Mowlabocus, pg. 68).
This pose usually appears in the form of white, shirtless gay men – or ‘straight’ gay men – who stand, muscles flexed, sporting a proud smirk before their mirror, their phones obscuring half their face.

Apps like Grindr, where individuals actively take on the queer classifications found in pornography as identities, are the most crucial technology in the self-pornification of gay men’s everyday lives (Mowlabocus, pg. 61). As I’ve said, the concept of hetero performativity and the lack of constant, clear boundaries between straight and queer worlds resituates straight white men as neither external nor transient constituents, but as active semi-members of a gay, sexual underworld where str8 dudes stand alongside bears, twinks, otters, and cubs. When heterosexuals become their own gay archetype, the dominant pornographic narratives that eroticize straight-acting white masculinity propel the men – straight-identifying or not – who fit this image to the top of the figurative sexual hierarchy of queer digital zones.

In this sense, Grindr “allows men to represent themselves via the medium of the profile but this method of representation simultaneously serves as a technique of surveillance” (Mowlabocus, pg. 71). Here, we should understand “surveillance” not only in the context of others but more importantly in the context of the self: every offense, every failure experienced on Grindr – and believe me, there are many – reads to the user as a deep condemnation, as material evidence of that individual’s failure to meet the norms so publicly displayed on Grindr’s romantically neoliberal grid. While CEO Joel Simkhai might have us “up our game” and try our hardest to meet these standards, the vast majority of us are simply unable to do so. Those of us who are not white, those of us who are feminine, those of us who simply do not possess athletic
bodies despite our attempts at diet and exercise – we are not, and never will be, an embodiment of the straight-passing white masculinity to which Grindr would have us conform.

My previous discussions of hetero performativity used the phrase *straight realness* to call attention to the ways in which straightness, just as any other sexuality or gender, is a constructed subjectivity and therefore capable of *deconstruction* and performance by those who do not *actually* identify as such. I use the term *realness* as a deliberate reference to the terminology of queer drag culture, where cisgender gay men perform femininity: the greater their performance, the closer they are to giving you feminine ‘realness.’ This isn’t accidental, but because I am deliberately trying to locate this discussion of heterosexual performativity within existing debates of gendered performativity in drag. Specifically, I am speaking of Judith Butler’s writing on this topic in her seminal text, *Bodies That Matter.* Butler raises the following question regarding male drag’s “denaturalization” of feminine norms:

> Does the denaturalization of the norm succeed in subverting the norm, or is this a denaturalization in the service of a perpetual reidealization, one that can only oppress, even as, or precisely when, it is embodied most effectively? (Butler, pg. 129)

In other words, we can understand the gay male performance of femininity and the gay male performance of heterosexuality in similar terms. Queer men are indeed “denaturalizing” straightness by performing it and even by adopting straight-acting or ‘straight’ gay subjectivities, but is that denaturalization actually succeeding in its subversion of these white heteromasculine norms?

The answer to the latter case is a decisive *no.* While hetero performativity is a practice in which queer men can freely pass from straight to gay according to their
own erotic desire – thus highlighting the ways in which context and performance rather than sexual disposition or biology constitute the social construction of heterosexuality – the adoption of permanent subjectivities built upon the sexualization of straight hetero-masculinity, what I call hetero assimilation, is decidedly unsubversive. The latter only expands the power of white hegemonic masculinity further into queer social territories, while the former seeks to expose – and yes, eroticize – the contradictions inherent in such a structure. Understanding hetero performativity as an erotic form of sexual drag requires consideration of the fact that, as Butler stresses, there is “no necessary relation between drag and subversion” (Butler, pg. 125). This is exactly the point in cases of hetero assimilation, a practice that works “in the service of both the denaturalization and reidealization of hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms,” and in our particular case, the reidealization of white, heterosexual masculinity (Butler, pg. 125).

Conclusion: Between Performativity and Assimilation

The purpose of this chapter is to detail the ways in which the worlds of queer and heterosexual men are not separate or even clearly distinct, and to affirm that “gay men and straight men … witness, perform, and even sometimes inhabit what is ostensibly one another’s relationship to homosexuality” (Ward, pg. 185). This interplay is not only present in the gay pornographic industry, as discussed in Chapter Two, but in the queer digital spaces in which hetero and homosexual men facilitate sexual activity across these identitarian lines – such as Craigslist and Grindr. This sexual activity with straight-identifying men, their eroticization by the highly
influential medium of gay pornography, and the self-pornification of gay men through their adherence to sexualized hetero stereotypes results in an idealization of straight-acting white masculinity.

It is important then to differentiate between the previously established concept of hetero performativity and the newly established concept of hetero assimilation. Hetero performativity is temporal, and therefore a queer individual’s adherence to said performance should be limited; it promotes awareness of the “imitative structure” of heterosexual identity and appropriates the sexual scripts that straight men use to recode their homosexual sex as heteromasculine, ironically recoding the gay sex of actually gay men as ephemerally straight for queer erotic means (Butler, pg. 125). Hetero performativity is a practice where queer men living within a heteronormative society can reclaim those “killing ideals” of gender and sexuality to be “mimed, reworked, [and] resignified” (Butler, pg. 124).

Hetero assimilation, on the other hand, is the unsubversive manifestation of this concept. While hetero performativity can be said to parody the straight men whose behavior it appropriates, hetero assimilation idealizes these individuals, upholding them as models for queer desire. Hetero assimilation is not temporal but constant; there is no moment of passing or transition, only a perpetual aggrandizement and self-application of white heteromasculine norms. We might understandably analyze hetero assimilation in relation to the same queer disavowal that straight-identifying men use to justify their own sex as heterosexual, as gay men who commit heterosexual assimilation have arguably completed a similar process, just stopping short of actually denying their identification with a gay subjectivity.
However, it is still a subjectivity they feel they must qualify, as either a ‘straight’ gay, a masc-4-masc type, or simply as ‘not like those other gays,’ meaning those who are unapologetically queer, at least in moments where our hetero performativity lapses.

My political suggestion is not to abandon hetero performativity altogether. I hold that such a phenomenon contains a veritable world of untapped, erotic queer potential. I also see hetero performativity as the queer community’s ‘response,’ so to speak, to the sex of straight white men, who would instrumentalize homosexual sex for the purposes of upholding, rather than subverting, white patriarchal power and heteronormativity. As Ward writes in the final chapter of her book, while straight white men instrumentalize the “communal, public, kinky, and defiant” aspects of gay sex to stress the supposed “meaninglessness of homosexual encounters” or to “signal … their true loyalty to heterosexual normalcy,” queer people must in turn understand these aspects as “the lifeblood of queer difference, to be cherished, preserved, and treated with reverence and sincerity” (Ward, pg. 211). The appropriation of sex between straight men and its heteromasculine discourses through eroticized hetero performativity is a way of taking back these acts in our own name and reclaiming the lifeblood of our difference. The answer is not then to abandon hetero performativity out of a fear of hetero assimilation, but to find the subversive, radical middle-ground; a place in between performativity and assimilation, between heterosexuality and queerness, where queer men can shatter norms, wreak havoc, and get off at the same time.
Conclusion:
Why You Can’t Defeat the Gay Agenda

“To operate within the matrix of power is not the same as to replicate uncritically relations of domination.”
—Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*

Sex between straight white men is everywhere. It can be found in boarding schools, in military bunkers, on Navy ships, in prisons, in frat houses, or just in the living rooms of adult men who look back at their adolescence with an erotic nostalgia. Homosexual acts are not isolated from the lives of heterosexuals; they are tools of heteromasculine identarian construction, that simultaneously – and paradoxically – allow straight men to release homosexual desire while strengthening their heterosexual constitution. Such a paradox is made possible by the deployment of sexual scripts, or particular discourses that tend to rely upon homophobic, misogynistic, and racist underpinnings. Despite the widespread nature of this phenomenon, analyses of hetero-homo activity tend to dismiss its relevance rather than critically evaluating their foundational nature to hetero-masculinity. However, many gay men tend to possess a rather extensive knowledge – both consciously and subconsciously – of this sexual behavior, and of the discourses that straight men use to recode their sex as heterosexual. This knowledge is gained through the consumption of pornography that depicts hetero-homo sex, from sexual activity between straight and queer-identifying men, and from the sometimes-clandestine presence of queer men in these actual spaces where this behavior occurs.

When I first began this research over a year ago, I found myself repeatedly grappling with the same concern. This concern wasn’t analytical, but rather political:
if I were to accept the point that the straight white men I was studying were indeed straight, then was I doing anything to disrupt their power? To me, it felt as if I were recognizing that heterosexual men were co-opting gay sex for unsubversive purposes – releasing their repressed queer desires, and yet using their sexual activity to fortify the walls of hegemonic masculine dominion – but doing nothing to disrupt that process, and therefore acquitting them of responsibility. This was more than a mere annoyance, as I worried that such an unchecked phenomenon could lead to a corruption of queer sex acts by these straight men who seek to instrumentalize them for heteromasculine intentions. I felt as if there must be some sort of wrench to throw into this patriarchal machination, some call to action I could make to stop this heterosexual takeover of homosexual sex.

How was I supposed to counter these men who engaged in homosexual sex while maintaining their position within the hetero-patriarchal hierarchy? My potential responses felt just as unsubversive as the machinations I sought to curtail. I suppose one answer would be to deny the heterosexuality of the men in question. As my professor of queer theory at the time pointed out, such an action would mean the policing of socio-sexual boundaries, which is to disavow the philosophical heart of queerness itself. Furthermore, it’s not as if I saw any of these men as gay in the first place: they all behaved, performed, and lived their lives as straight men, while engaging in homosexual activity in particular contexts. Worse than analytical inaccuracy, this came with its own political costs. What exactly does queerness gain if we simply smear all straight men who engage in hetero-homo sex as gay themselves? Certainly not much. And are we then providing these men with access to
queer bars, to our undergrounds and our parks, our cafes and our bookstores, our parades and our potlucks? I would hope not. These are the very spaces that we should be seeking to preserve, not sacrifice, in our political opposition to hetero-masculinity.

This left me with a dilemma. A project that covered this phenomenon but offered no pathways for resisting the manipulations of hetero-patriarchy did not feel complete to me. My potential suggestions for resistance felt just as futile or self-defeating and would actively undermine the core premises of the research itself. It was not until I turned my focus to gay pornography and to queer digital worlds like Grindr that I realized hetero performativity was the answer I was seeking.

Hetero performativity is the process by which gay men can reassert queer meaning and sincerity against the straight white men who annex homosexual sex acts for heteromasculine purposes. It is not merely a practice of erotic roleplay, but a method for appropriating and eroticizing heterosexual masculinity itself. Individuals, behaviors, discourses, fashion and style, settings and environments, even objects are all capable of queer reinscription through this practice. In Chapter Two, I offer jockstraps as an example of the real-world powers of hetero performativity: once generally accepted as a masculine athletic accessory, the jockstrap is now predominantly sold as a gay fetish item. We might wonder how the open eroticization of not only particular clothing but even heteromasculine spaces such as the military and the fraternity can recode these settings with queer, erotic possibilities.

To help realize hetero performativity’s subversive potential, we must also understand the risks of the practice. As elaborated in Chapter Three, there is sometimes a thin line between hetero performativity and hetero assimilation: the
former seeks to parody and subvert, while the latter upholds and idealizes. Hetero performativity is always ephemeral, distinguishing its practice from the ways in which straight-identifying men perform hetero-masculinity. It similarly distinguishes the practice from those queers who are guilty of hetero assimilation, as their adherence to heteromasculine ideals and tropes is unbroken or even subliminal. The entrance and exit from heterosexual performativity help qualify that its participants do not live their lives by such performance, while also demonstrating the ways in which hetero-masculinity is itself a constructed and performed identity. Hetero performativity is then both a practice of subverting the hetero-homo binary while also asserting queer difference and excellence against the assimilationist whims of heteromasculine culture.

Queers who engage in hetero performativity should furthermore separate the performance of hetero-masculinity from specifically muscular, white bodies. As stated previously, one of the major problematics of hetero performativity is its reliance upon the limited bodily template of straight-acting white masculinity. Such a template actively excludes any queers who are nonwhite or who lack athletic physiques. If gay men are to appropriate straightness for our own erotic and political means, then we should push that appropriation further and rewrite the coding of hetero-masculinity so that queers of different stripes can take pleasure from its performance. This possibility is visible in some gay pornography which protracts straightness into the jock body type: previously mentioned websites like Sketchy Sex

---

13 This is not necessarily always the case. Take the previously mentioned Grindr user who proudly refers to themselves as a “straight gay.” These kinds of self-imposed classifications signal a degree of awareness when it comes to hetero assimilation.
use both white and nonwhite actors to erotically perform straight-acting positionalities. This point is important not only because it counters the inherent whiteness of heteromasculine culture but because it simultaneously counters the white, muscular idealization found in neoliberal romantic spaces like Grindr.

For some, the eroticization of straightness can even be a process of healing or reclamation. It allows people like me to rearticulate and reimagine our past existence in heteronormative places as one rife with erotic potential. I recall the experience of sitting in my high school’s weight room, watching as two athletes flexed and caressed each other’s biceps, complimenting their “gains.” I was so struck by this encounter, not only because of the its duration or its rather obvious display of homoeroticism, but because I had seen this exact scenario depicted over and over in gay narrative porn! I realized suddenly that I was the only one in the room who recognized the raw, masculine eroticism of that moment. While those two men were in the process of justifying that behavior as heteromasculine, I was subsequently applying my own queer, erotic interpretation. I later recounted the story to my queer friend and we both reveled in the unrealized gay carnality of such heteromasculine arenas.

While talking recently with that same friend, we discussed how – despite our general sense of social marginalization and disenfranchisement – we couldn’t help but look back at our high school with a degree of erotic nostalgia, one not completely unlike the nostalgia expressed by straight-identifying men on Craigslist. As Jane Ward says, the homosexual encounters of straight white men are sometimes remarkably similar to a queer collective sexuality (Ward, pg. 211). In some ways, the nipple-tweaking, ass-grabbing culture of heteromasculine spaces like my high school
felt more queer than the culture of avowedly queer spaces like Wesleyan! Adopting such an erotic perspective allows people like my friend and I to derive pleasure from otherwise painfully homophobic environments or experiences, its own subtle challenge to heteronormativity.

Hetero performativity and the eroticization of straightness are then not only methods of pleasure but their own powerful tools of queer world-building. Their usage allows for a potential destruction of the hetero-homo binary, and one based in unapologetically queer demands. This project is then not a study of straight men “co-opting” or “taking over” homosexual sex, but rather a study of the unstoppable forces of queerness. When heterosexual men recode their homosexual behavior as straight, gay men possess our own scripts to reinscribe that activity with queer sincerity and pleasure. It was through this theorization of heteromasculine performance that I realized it was never queerness but heterosexuality that was in danger of takeover this entire time. It is heterosexuality that must constantly assert its boundaries against the specter of queerness and must constantly fear of queer invaders in its midst. But despite all its machinations, queerness will always find new discourses capable of appropriation, behaviors capable of performance, and other fissures in the heterosexual façade that are open to penetration by the indelible powers of queerness.

No homo, though.
Bibliography


“Wet Blanket Wife.” *TV Tropes*, tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/WetBlanketWife.
