

Queering Masculine Peer Culture: Softening Gender Performances on the University Dance Floor

In this article we examine the masculinities of heterosexual men in United Kingdom university settings, highlighting that multiple influences shape perceptions of gender and sexuality—influences that are also used to subvert a polarized gender and sexuality order. This is evidenced by how straight men dance, interact, and occasionally kiss each other. Accordingly, we ask what it means when queer masculinities are performed by otherwise straight-identifying men. We examine the implications that the queering of straights has on understandings of gender and sexuality, arguing that, whether the context is a sporting event or a dance hall, social terrains rely on a body of assumed knowledge that helps construct the social meanings inculcated in and performed by moving bodies. We suggest that what used to be subversive signs of a polarized gender and sexuality order are increasingly found in the domain of popular and normative heterosexual culture.

Key Words: Dance, Masculinities, Queer, Peer Culture

Queering the Heterosexual Dance Floor

The music blares throughout the dance hall. Youthful and intoxicated bodies hedonistically pulsate, absorbing its rhythms. The colored lights flash across the walls and reflect off the floor. John and Peter synchronize their gyrating hips to the beat, then down and around to the song's syncopated lyric. Their attractive bodies slowly succumb to the libidinal forces of the music, and their desire to join bodies. When the lyric of Taio Cruz's (2008) song "Come on Girl" beckons, "I love how you shake that little booty around the club, I just wanna turn you, me, into a us," Peter and John's crotches join, pulsing and grinding together in synchronized form. John wraps his left arm around Peter's lower back and Peter's right hand grabs John's neck and draws him in closer. As the music and lights climax, Peter goes in for a kiss. John mirrors Peter and their lips touch. The song ends, their eyes open, and they smile. But this is not a gay club, and Peter and John are not gay. This is a university dance club, and Peter and John are self-identifying heterosexuals who attend the university. After dancing, Peter leaves John to walk over to his girlfriend, Sarah, who is standing nearby. He takes her hand and gives her a kiss on the cheek.

Peter and John are not alone in the sexualized nature in which they dance. Virtually all men in this and four other university-aged clubs we conducted our participant observations in saw men dancing this way. Whereas men used to sit on one side of the room, working up the courage to ask a girl to dance from the other side, today men in the UK go to clubs together, in groups or pairs, and for most of the evening dance only with each other. While they may have danced near each other just a few years ago, today they dance with each other.

It is not just men dancing together that we see. We recently saw two men snake through a crowded dance floor, one holding the hand of the other, so as not to lose him in the dense crowd. At the same club, men sit in a corner, one's arm draped around the other. At a

considerably harder Bristol (non-university) club we saw two lower-class youths kiss. At the same club we see middle-class boys wearing cardigan sweaters and higher-end clothes.

Accordingly, we suggest that what used to be subversive signs of a polarized gender and sexuality order are increasingly found in the domain of popular and normative heterosexual culture. From fashion to casual kissing, on the dance floor or in the classroom, what does it mean when gay and queer masculinities are performed by otherwise straight-identifying men? What implications does the homosexualization of heterosexuals, or the queering of straights, have on understandings of gender and sexuality?

Heteromascularity

Connell (1987, 1995) advances an understanding of the problematic process of understanding masculinities, particularly highlighting the privilege some versions of masculinity retain over subordinated and marginalized others. Perhaps her insight comes from her own queer sense as Raewyn used to be Robert. Connell suggests the hegemonic form of masculinity shifts in response to cultural influences, permitting it to maintain social dominance. Anderson (2005a) suggests that many of the achieved and ascribed attributes of contemporary hegemonic masculinity are no better epitomized than in the masculine playgrounds of university team sports. Accordingly, we discuss team sports here because they have been shown to set the masculine norms and standards of university cultures. This is particularly true at the university under observation because it is ranked one of the premier athletic institutions in the United Kingdom. Accordingly, if a queer perspective on masculinities is found within this university culture, one might expect it plausible in other universities, too.

The ideal university athlete is strong, masculine, good looking, and hyper-heterosexual. Correspondingly, studies of the multiple and changing forms of masculinities (Kimmel, 1997) have contributed to a growing body of literature examining the role teamsports play in the construction of hegemonic masculinity, particularly in North America

(Anderson, 2002, 2005a; Messner, 1992, 2002). These studies highlight sports' influence and socialization of almost all boys into a sex-segregated system of team sports, in which they are regularly taught to devalue women, femininity, and gay men (Anderson, 2008; Messner, 2002). Conversely, boys and men who occupy feminine terrain or play feminized sports such as gymnastics or cheer are often thought gay, stigmatized by the institutional culture that associates homosexuality with feminine terrains (Adams, 1993; Anderson, 2005b; Grindstaff & West, 2006; Hanson & Pratt, 1995).

Queer Theories on Gender

Like gender, sexual identities are also socially constructed (Seidman, 2002) and continuously contested (Flowers & Buston, 2001) categories of social power. Significantly, as Foucault ([1984] 1990) shows us, these categories are not a natural fact of human nature, but are a “set of effects produced in bodies, behaviors, and social relations by a certain deployment deriving from a complex political technology” (p. 127). According to Foucault, the dissemination of gender and sexual norms are not only from the top-down, but are formed by a complex matrix of power relations between individuals and institutions. Homophobia and sexism, then, are forms of official and self-regulatory powers that aim to segregate and relegate gender and sexuality.

As Guy Hocquenghem ([1972] 1993), one of the forefathers of queer theory, suggests, homophobia becomes a tool to regulate the suppressed homosocial and homosexual desires inherent in everyone, not just self-identifying homosexuals. The work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990, 1993) would later rearticulate and expand this point, becoming a popular springboard for much of queer theory. Sedgwick uses the term homosociality to analyze the blurry lines between encounters of men of the same sex and homosexual identifications. In the process of policing these desires, homophobic social stigma begets a system of compulsory heterosexuality maintaining the hegemonic gender norms observed in Western

cultures (Rich, 1980; Rubin, 1984). But the stigma associated with men's homosexuality reflects more than just the fear of sex between men: male homosexuality, as Sedgwick and others have demonstrated, is also disparaged because it is regularly conflated with femininity (Barrett, 2000; Kimmel, 1994; Nardi, 1995; Pharr, 1988; Pronger, 1990; Sedgwick, 1990, 1993), something Pepper Schwartz and Virginia Rutter (1998) describe as the gender of sexuality.

Boys (Epstein et al., 2001; Pollack, 1999) and men (Anderson, 2005a; Messner, 1992) wishing to avoid homosexual stigma generally do not work (Williams, 1995) or play (Adams, 1993; McGuffey & Rich, 1999) in feminized terrain or act in effeminate ways (Kimmel, 1994) if they desire to be perceived as heterosexual and masculine (heteromasculine) among peers. Accordingly, while occupying feminized terrains, boys and men traditionally position themselves away from femininity to show they are not feminine and therefore not gay (Anderson, 2005a; McGuffey & Rich, 1999). Epstein et al. (2001, p. 135) note, "Even little boys are required to prove that they are 'real boys' in ways that mark them as masculine, even macho, and therefore (by definition) heterosexual." Hence, homophobia does more than just marginalize gay men; it also regulates and limits the behavior of straight boys and men.

The desire to be perceived as heteromasculine is understandable in a culture that distributes privilege unequally according to gender and sexuality (Connell, 1987; Lorber, 1994). Consequently, when heterosexual boys and men fear the stigma of homosexuality, they normally conceal their same-sex sexual forms of homosociality. This is because same-sex sexual behavior is normally conflated with a homosexual identity in North American and Western European cultures (Anderson, 2005a; Jagose, 1996; Lancaster, 1988; Nardi, 1995; Parker, 1999). Tomás Almaguer (1991, p. 77) suggests same-sex sex historically carries "...with it a blanket condemnation of all same sex behavior...because it is at odds with a rigid, compulsory heterosexual norm." Roger Lancaster's work (1988, p. 116) compliments

this rigid model, arguing, “Even homosexual desires stigmatize one as homosexual.” Judith Butler (1997) agrees, suggesting gender is acquired by repudiating homosexual sex and by having never lusted after someone of the same sex. Under this framework, the only way to be considered heterosexual is to avoid any same-sex sexual act and to avoid admitting same-sex sexual desire, something Michael Messner (2004, p. 422) describes as being “100 percent straight.”

Borrowing from the one-drop theory of race (Davis, 1991; Harris, 1964), in which a dominant white culture once viewed any person with even a portion of black genetic ancestry as black, and thus non-white, Eric Anderson (2008) calls the stigma attached to the behavioral component of homosocial interaction the one-time rule of homosexuality. One same-sex sexual or pseudo-sexual experience in contemporary hegemonic codes of masculinity is usually equated with, or stigmatized as having, a homosexual identity. This rules out the possibility of men engaging in recreational same-sex sex or pseudo-sex without the stigma of a homosexual label (Anderson, 2005a). Under this rubric of taboo, it only takes one act of same-sex behavior to be associated with homosexual stigma. However, the inverse of this rule does not evenly apply as Schwartz (1995, p. 12) suggests, “We have to rethink how we have demonized the power of homosexuality so that we assume it to be the greater truth of our sexual self—as if one drop of homosexuality tells the truth of self while one drop of heterosexuality in a homosexual life means nothing.”

This one-way application of the one-time rule has also created a double jeopardy for men who reveal they have experience with same-sex sex. It disqualifies them from achieving the requisites of orthodox heterosexuality and it diminishes their masculine capital among peers (Anderson, 2005a). While Reis (1961) and Klein (1993) show that some heterosexual men (including those who financially profit from sex with men) are less inclined to fear gay stigma, and same-sex sex is also less threatening to heterosexual men in certain homogenous,

masculine institutions, like prisons and the military (Bérubé, 1991; Gear & Ngubeni, 2002), the general rule seems to be that for most heterosexual men in contemporary North American and Western European culture, their socially perceived heterosexual identities are partially conditioned upon exclusive opposite-sex sexual behaviors (Butler, 1990).

Many have found that when self-identifying heterosexual men do engage in same-sex sex, they normally structure anonymity into these transactions (Boykin, 2005; Corzine & Kirby, 1977; Humphreys, 1975). This is something King and Hunter (2004) and Keith Boykin (2005) describe among African-American men who have sex with men as being “on the down low,” and it might explain why recent quantitative research on team sport athletes finds less than 4 percent engaging in same-sex sex (Southall et al., 2006). Confidentiality enables men to have sex with men and avoid the stigma associated with same-sex sex identity categories.

None of this is to suggest that sexual orientation, identity, and behaviors are synonymous; indeed the matrix of sexuality is fraught with ambiguity and contradictions (Butler, 1993; Rubin, 1984; Sedgwick, 1990, 1993) that are complicated by sexual fantasies, attractions, behaviors, self-identities and cultural understandings (Foucault, 1984; Lubensky et al., 2004). Accordingly, this one-time rule does not work equally in all cultures.

Many scholars have problematized the cross-cultural applicability of the way North American and Western European models of homosexuality and gay identities are constructed because these models do not much differentiate the structure or role men play in same-sex sexual practices (Almaguer, 1991; Carrier, 1971, 1995; Lancaster, 1988; Parker & Caceres, 1999; Warner, 1993). Men throughout regions of Latin America, for example, are permitted to anally penetrate other males and retain—or even promote—their heterosexuality. In this type of model, men’s heterosexuality is determined by penetration, not the sex of whom one penetrates.

Furthermore, not all cultures conflate homosexual behaviors with a homosexual identity, something Gilbert Herdt (1981) famously shows with the ritual copulation of younger boys by older boys in Sambian culture. Thus, the way North American and Western European heterosexual men identify with same-sex sex seems more prohibitive, and the meanings attached to it are stigmatized differently than the way other cultures understand same-sex sex. This variance highlights the multiplicity of genders and the plurality of sexualities, both intra-culturally and cross-culturally (Redman, 2001).

Of particular relevance with this research, we found heterosexual university men also engaging in ambiguous same-sex sexual behavior on the dance floor, and that they attach new meanings to their sexual activities and identities. Dancers infrequently but sometimes kiss one another, which has some degree of sexual connotation, even if they say it does not (Anderson, 2010). We argue that these behaviors are a change that perhaps more closely resembles elements of the Latin American system of gender and sexuality. Anderson (2008) has previously found occurrences in which gay men were invited to have limited forms of sex with their ostensibly heterosexual peers. But these accounts also find heterosexual men explicitly concerned with anonymity in their same-sex sexual behaviors—one major reason why heterosexual males engaging in same-sex sex may be underrepresented in current quantitative research (Southall et al., 2006). Anderson goes on to suggest that recent trends in shifting sexual attitudes are, at least for this group of men, influencing how other university-aged self-identified heterosexual men structure and manage their same-sex sexual behaviors.

Shifting Attitudes on Sexuality and Gender

There are a number of trends that may influence how university-aged, heterosexual men construct their sexual and gendered identities. First, since the early 1990s, both qualitative (Barrett & Pollack, 2005; Pascoe, 2005) and quantitative (Laumann et al., 1994; Loftus, 2001; Widmer, Treas, & Newcomb, 2002; Ohlander, Batalova, & Treas, 2005; Yang, 1997)

studies show a significant decrease in cultural and institutional homophobia within Western cultures (Anderson, 2002, 2005a, 2005b, 2010; Price & Parker, 2003; Southall et al., 2006). Second, there is increasing evidence of a form of normative masculinity growing more inclusive of feminine gender expression, particularly among university-aged, white, middle-class men (Anderson, 2005b, 2008, 2009; Hyman, 2004; Price & Parker, 2003). Third, recent decades have brought a lessening of traditional stigmatizing views and institutional control of sexual behaviors and relationships (Joyner & Laumann, 2001). This is made evident by the growing percentage of those engaging in pre-marital intercourse (Laumann et al., 1994; Johnson et al., 2001) and the lessening of the traditional double standard of girls being “sluts” and guys being “studs” in heterosexual intercourse (Tanenbaum, 1999; Wolf, 1997).

It is reasonable to suspect, then, that these changing cultural trends have implications for a sex-gender system that conflates homosexuality with femininity (Pascoe, 2005). For example, John Ibson (2002) shows how increasing cultural homophobia influences heterosexual men to further police their gendered behaviors while decreasing trends in cultural homophobia has the opposite effect.

Homosexual Stigma and HIV/AIDS

The apex of cultural awareness of homosexual identities came at a particularly relevant time for the study of masculinities. Just as our culture grew aware that anyone could be gay (sending men into homophobic performances in order to prove that they were not gay), the gay community was hit by two substantial socio-political events. These events impacted not only gay masculinities (Levine, 1998) but men’s gendered understandings as a whole. The first came in the form of a cultural backlash to the gains made by gay men and feminists of the 60s and 70s.

The development of the counter-culture in the 60s and 70s and the subsequent conservative backlash of the 80s are perhaps best seen in the phenomenon of disco. Disco

was invented by largely unacknowledged black, gay DJs who overlapped “soul and Philly (Philadelphia International) records, fazing them in and out, to form uninterrupted soundtracks for nonstop dancing” (Thomas, 1995, p. 439). The use of black soul music, itself derived from black gospel, marks the secularization and appropriation of black church music by gay men and, thus, the reconfiguration of religious narratives into sexual ones. Thelma Houston’s “Don’t Leave Me This Way” and Cheryl Lynn’s “Got to Be Real” are disco examples that reconfigure the ideas of spiritual salvation in gospel and soul into ideas of sexual salvations.

In this respect, disco, for gay men, became a popular church of the orgasm. The fact that the etymology of disco relies on a space—the *discothèque*—speaks to the central role that “claiming a space” had within the development of disco and gay communities. Disco provided some of the first spaces where gay men could come together and “out” their forbidden desires to one another.

Disco came to a sudden demise, however, with the ushering in of the 80s. The homophobic-slanted 1979 campaign of “disco sucks” set out to abolish disco and its homosexual (sexual deviancy) and feminine associations (Hughes, 1994; Dyer, 1995). The apex of this phenomenon was most poignantly expressed during a mass demonstration at the halftime show “Disco Demolition” at Chicago’s Comiskey Park baseball stadium. DJ Steve Dahl led an over-capacity crowd of 50,000 in a ritualistic explosion of the crowd’s self-sacrificed disco records; he piled them together and detonated several pounds of TNT to the crowd’s chants of “Disco Sucks! Dis-co Sucks!” (Cheren, 2003). Accordingly, just as disco emerged from the closet in the 60s and 70s, it was forced back in with the beginning of the homophobic 80s.

Indeed, with a recession in 1979 and continuing into the 1980 election of Ronald Reagan (as well as the 1979 election of Margaret Thatcher in Britain), cultural conservatives

were determined to reclaim their respective countries from the apparently out-of-control counter-culture and New Left of the 60s and 70s. The excess of disco, both its material glamour and sexual freedom, could not survive such cultural changes.

This trend continued in the 90s with the religious right's crusade to reclaim "the soul of America" (as Pat Robertson declared in 1992), which in most contexts meant to remasculinize America. Heterosexual gender roles were to be recalibrated through organizations like the religious right's "Promise Keepers." Freud's explanation of homosexuality as the product of an absent father figure also found a renewed emphasis during this time (Kimmel, 1997). Mainstream culture was hell bent on addressing and redefining the crisis of masculinity.

Notably, however, the gender inquisition of the mid 80s and 90s made its mark in dance music. Disco was phased out and replaced by the largely homophobic and "hypermasculine" genre of rock 'n' roll. The only surviving remnants of disco were its musical decedents, "garage" (in New York from 1977–84) and "house" (in Chicago from 1984–89), both derived from the original New York gay, black disco music trope. These genres, however, eventually developed into "acid house" (1988–92), "hardcore" (1988–92), and "industrial" (1983–92). The new forms of club music abandoned diva narratives and instead emphasized sensory overload with pure, electronic loudness and speed, employing rigid rhythms, dark tones, and extreme frequencies.

Left in the wake of these inherently "hypermasculine" forms, disco waned and its use was primarily transfigured into requiems for the many lost by the HIV/AIDS crisis. As Walter Hughes (1994, p. 156) poignantly writes, "1970s [disco] songs like 'Don't Leave Me This Way' and 'Never Can Say Good-bye' [became], in the 1980s, part of the work of mourning." Songs that once celebrated sexual excess were now being used to cope with unimaginable losses. Bodies that were once virile with heightened sexuality and donned

masculinities were now stripped by disease, poxed with Kaposi's sarcoma, and stigmatized as contagion by ignorant and reluctant governments.

Homosexuality and its association with HIV/AIDS was not only pathologized as a lack of masculinity, but it was perceived as a "lifestyle" that resulted in death. Gay men were stigmatized as being effeminate, diseased, and even a threat to the public. In Britain, this atmosphere expressed itself in the 1987 witch hunt for gay football (soccer) referee Norman Redman who disclosed his HIV status. Mark Simpson (1994) writes how Redman was forced from public life and moved to a secret address after receiving threats and having excrement pushed through his mailbox. Soon after this the Football Association moved to ban kissing among its players after goals, on the justification that it would prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The men's movement of the HIV/AIDS era was, just like during earlier parts of the 20th century, a way for men to distance themselves from what one was not to be. This time, however, in addition to using the stigma of femininity and employing religious righteousness (especially in the United States), dominant culture was now using medical epidemiology to configure its strictures against homosexuality and gender expression. The anxiety over HIV/AIDS played a dramatic role in men's desire to constitute their masculine subjectivities.

HIV/AIDS had an incalculable and unfortunately rarely acknowledged effect on the gender expression of men, both hetero-sexual and homosexual. Men's suspicions of other men's serostatus functioned as a form of sexual survival and fostered an environment of systematic corporeal policing among men. Such anxieties became reflexive and shaped how men developed and advertised their bodies for sexual encounters. To disassociate oneself from previous markers of gay virility, namely the hair and moustaches of the 70s and 80s now signifying the older and possibly infected generations, the sexual economy of the 90s depended on the theory that the younger and more muscular a man was, the less likely he was

to have HIV/AIDS. In the late 80s and early 90s, body hair became a sign of age; it meant age in particular but experience in general and thus was conflated as a prime indicator of health (Signorile, 1997). This led to the ultra-masculine, hairless, shaved bodies and faces that dominated the 90s and continue to spread throughout metropolitan heterosexual communities.

Essentially, this era was more or less a corporeal pissing contest based on who looked youngest and disease-free, explicated through hairless muscularity. The hauntingly Darwinist nature of 90s gay sexual politics continued to edge the more feminine and less masculine alternative gender signs further toward the margins of gay communities. Medical technologies of the 80s and 90s also added to the masculinization of gay and straight cultures. Steroids were first introduced into gay communities as a necessity for HIV/AIDS patients, but were soon misused by many gay men as body enhancers (Halkitis, 2000). Similarly, with the proliferation of fitness industries in the 90s (with gyms and vitamin shops becoming a cornerstone in most urban areas) gay men adopted new workout regimens to ensure muscular physiques (Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000).

If HIV/AIDS did anything good for the gay community, it brought such visibility (albeit the wrong type) that it solidified that homosexuals existed in great numbers, that we were lurking in every social institution. Equally as important, it was another catalyst for gays and lesbians to talk about homosexuality from a “rights” perspective. Then, as the virus later took hold in heterosexual communities, the stigma it brought to those infected slowly began to wane. This is not to say that HIV/AIDS was not and is still not overly conflated with homosexuality or that it is not still stigmatized, but we are at least more nuanced today in our understanding that HIV/AIDS is not caused by homosexuality. As this occurred, social attitudes began to swing back in the other direction. By 1993 homophobia, and the orthodox masculinity used to sustain it, was in retreat.

Thus, just as increasing homophobia (through the awareness of homosexuality) begat compulsory “heteromascularity” and social distance among men in the 80s and early 90s, it stands to reason that a reduction in cultural homophobia would have just the opposite affect. As homophobia declines, men should be permitted—even encouraged—to come closer together, physically and emotionally. As homophobia lessens (Barnett & Thomson, 1996; Laumann et al., 2004; Loftus, 2001; Widmer, Treas, & Newcomb, 2002) there might even be a reconstruction of the relationship among sex, men, and the gender order so that decreasing homophobia might also decrease men’s dominance over women (Bourdieu, 2001).

The trends we speak of can be slightly confusing. On one hand, we speak of cultural homophobia rising in response to an increased awareness of homosexuality. On the other, we speak of cultural homophobia declining in recent years, despite the fact that more people are aware of the existence of homosexuals. Quite simply, this means that if members of a culture do not believe that homosexuality is possible, there is no need to prove to one’s peers that one is not gay. This is explained by Anderson’s (2009) notion of homohysteria: A culture of high awareness of homosexuality and high homophobia. Men’s gendered behaviors are highly policed in a homohysterical culture. However, in a culture of low awareness of homosexuality (or one with high awareness of homosexuality but low homophobia), men are given a wider range of gendered expression. Thus, there are two steps in creating cultural homohysteria—the first is raising awareness that homosexuality exists, and the second is stigmatizing it. Identity politics then pick up on this, raising awareness of the issue as a human rights concern, and advocating for legal equality, which is then hoped to bring cultural equality and less policing of heterosexual men’s gendered behaviors, too (low homohysteria).

Metrosexuality and Inclusive Masculinity

As idealized buffed bodies of the late 80s and early 90s served to show that one was not diseased, not effeminate, and not gay (Pope, 2000), things have radically changed. For

example, in 1997 Leonardo DiCaprio was culturally promoted as a sex symbol. His status as sex icon was not felt at all levels of society, but his twinkish build resonated with young women and gay men. His sexualized boyish physique stood in stark contrast to the sexually esteemed men of the 80s, men like Stallone and Schwarzenegger. DiCaprio's emergence as an idol marked the cultural change for men to be sexualized not through muscle, but the avoidance of fat. This is a trend that gained in strength over the next decade. Filiault (2007) shows that what remains important for men today is not how much muscle they have, but how little fat they have covering that muscle. This rapid change is likely produced by a number of social influences, including corporate marketing. What-ever its antecedents however, the emergence of DiCaprio as a sex idol signals a further shift away from the dominance of orthodox masculinity in the broader culture.

Mark Simpson (1994) coined the term metrosexual but the idea of homosexualizing heterosexuals goes back to Frank Rich's 1987 *Esquire* article in which he called it "the most dramatic cultural assimilation of our time" (qtd. in Buckland, 2002, p. 142). Rich warned that the commoditized sensibilities of the gay PINK (Professional Income, No Kids) market were quickly crossing over into the heterosexual mainstream. English soccer player David Beckham then became the lightning rod for dialogue surrounding these new conceptions (and consumptions) of metrosexuality.

The further broadening definition of metrosexual is also evident in Anderson's various research settings (2005, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Anderson, Adams & Rivers, 2010). Some interviewees use the term metrosexual to describe their increased fluidity in gender expression, others use it as a euphemism for bisexuality, and still others use it to describe a heterosexual male who dabbles in same-sex sex. When reporting their differently gendered perspectives on sex, women, clothing, or just about anything else that varies from orthodox

prescriptions, many of the men Anderson interviewed asked, “So does that make me metrosexual?”

Defining the term metrosexual is not our intent. In fact, the indefinable nature of the label is arguably queer. As Sedgwick (1993, pp. 8–9) theorizes, queer “can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and ex-cesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically.” Butler (1993, p. 113) goes one step further by suggesting that “it may be only by risking the incoherence of identity that connection is possible.” Thus the queer power behind the evasiveness of the term metrosexuality gives it deconstructive as well as productive power. It provides a label for men under which to identify who contests orthodox masculinity, yet it provides enough wiggle room for still-shifting understandings of the term.

Admittedly, Butler would argue that this type of slippery gender subversion, despite appearing to destabilize heterosexual norms, is merely a re-idealization and reconfiguration of its terms. Butler’s model of gender performativity, which she redefined after multiple misreadings of *Gender Trouble* (1990), “is not a radical fabrication of a gendered self; it is a compulsory repetition of prior and subjectivating norms...” (1993a, p. 22). Performativity for Butler is not a subversive act performed by individuals as we are constructing it here, as much as it is a re-signifying phenomenon that “precedes and conditions the formation of the subject” (1993a, p. 18).

Therefore, although we call upon some of the queer definitions outlined in much of Butler’s work, we do not ascribe to her model of gender performativity as it evacuates the individual of socio-political agency. On the contrary, our research indicates that the minoritarian and sublimated gender codes of femininity being performed by males in otherwise hegemonic masculine peer culture can transform the power relations among these

men. Their reported experiences of feminine-gendered performances resonate with very real—if only in the sense they are perceived by the respondents—social and political implications.

Significantly, the behaviors attached to the label metrosexual are codes that were once attached to the label homosexual. So while metrosexuality means different things to different people, it is the fluidity of the term that makes it influential in queerly challenging the orthodoxy of masculine peer culture. The label has given men a long-awaited popular justification for the ability to associate with femininity and to cross previously stigmatized boundaries of homo-sociality. The term metrosexuality permits men to say, “I am not gay, I am metrosexual.” It has therefore serves as a mediating factor in the manner in which homophobia has traditionally policed gendered boundaries.

However, we do not deny the limitations of metrosexuality as a popular term and its inability to completely subvert hegemonic positions of orthodox masculinity. Tim Edwards (2006) argues that just like the “new man” literature of the 90s, metrosexuality is a media invention that is more connected to “patterns of consumption and marketing, or the commodification of masculinities, than to second-wave feminism and sexual politics” (p. 4). But developing an inclusive masculinity model that builds upon the commoditized foundations of metrosexuality suggests that inclusive masculinity(ies) operate in opposition to certain aspects of orthodox masculine values. Thus, the emergence of metrosexuality is compelling in that it highlights alternate masculine narratives, at least for those privileged enough to afford it. A decade after its coining, however, the diffuse application of metrosexuality (real or imagined) has permitted men of many classes and backgrounds to associate with increasing discursive forms of femininity.

We argue that the existence of inclusive masculinity in the form of metrosexuality highlights awareness that heterosexual men can act in ways once associated with

homosexuality with less threat to one's public identity as heterosexual, and that this has an increasingly positive influence on men to associate with women and femininity.

University Dance Floor as a Cultural Site

We propose that today's new cultural formations of gender and sexual categories can be best viewed in the often academically neglected landscape of the dance floor, which is a particularly good indicator of the power of the broader culture. In *Dancing Desires* (2001), Jane Desmond argues that "dance provides a privileged arena for the bodily enactments of sexuality's semiotics and should be positioned at the centre, not the periphery of sexuality studies" (p. 3). Indeed, social dance redolently employs and reflects cultural notions of gender, sexuality, desire, race, class, and social bonding and its academic embrace could prove productive for many academic fields.

The study of gender as performance and as choreography can be a challenging project, however. One struggles to organize ephemeral gestures, glances, and costuming into discernable lexicons and categories to be analyzed—vivisectioning the moves of a live body and repositioning them to suit theoretical frameworks. Moreover, the discourses surrounding gender and sexuality are continually plagued by slippery semantics that ultimately reflect the subjective historic specificity of its very construction. Nonetheless, closely examining the nexus of cultural moments and movements cannot only illuminate hegemonic regimes (be they upper-class-white-heteronormative modes of gender, for example) but can also deconstruct them, offering new directions for productive action and intervention. To unsettle hegemonic discourses is to make the invisible, visible.

McClary (1991) emphasizes how the dancing body is a significant sight worthy of academic attention, arguing that it is through the body's corporeal interpretations that the musical/historical moment is often revealed—especially when it is subversive in nature.

McClary writes that music "especially as it intersects with the body and destabilizes accepted

norms of subjectivity, gender and sexuality—is precisely where the politics of music often reside” (p. 32). In this intersection, dance becomes the vehicle of the music and performs the negotiation (and disruption) of contemporaneous gender politics. McClary also proposes that “music is foremost among cultural ‘technologies of the body,’ that is a site where we learn how to experience socially mediated patterns of kinetic energy, being in time, emotions, desire, pleasure and much more” (p. 33). Here McClary draws on Teresa de Lauretis’s notion of “technologies of gender” (which de Lauretis derives from Foucault’s “technology of sex”) as a system of knowledge production.

de Lauretis (1987) focuses on cinematic practices as technologies of gender.

According to de Lauretis’s theory, gender, like Foucault’s theory of sexuality, is not a priori but is rather “the set of effects produced in bodies, behaviors and social relations” relative to a “complex political technology” (p. 3). Combining the projects of de Lauretis and McClary, we would like to focus on both the music and the dance floor of a club as forms of gender technology.

Besides the musical structure encased in pop music—which employs variations of tension and release with choral/verse and density of highs/lows—the lyrics, more than any other factor, point to pop music’s explicit project of uniting bodies through sexual desire. Notably, many of the hit pop songs carry traces of the liberating theologies characteristic in earlier forms of disco such as Destiny’s Child’s “Survivor” (2001) (“I will survive//Keep on surviving//I’m a survivor”) or Christina Aguilera’s “Fighter” (2002) (“Made my skin a little bit thicker//Makes me that much smarter//So thanks for making me a fighter”). These songs uncannily recall defiant disco antecedents like Gloria Gaynor’s “I Will Survive” (1979) and Diana Ross’s “I’m Coming Out” (1980) that often relied on individualism and self-reinvention. Interestingly, many of the clubs we attend now mix these songs with current pop

music (along with several other disco/gay/camp songs). It is quite common in the southwest of England to see men dancing and singing to “It’s Raining Men,” too.

Self-liberating narratives, however, are the exception in pop music, and the majority of songs express the desire to unite bodies with narratives that rely upon another dancer’s body. In “I’m a Slave for You” (2001), Britney Spears sings, “Baby don’t you wanna dance up on me//To another time and place.” And in “Boys” (2001) Spears orders, “Let’s turn this dance floor into our own little nasty world.” Spears is not only expressing sexuality, but she explicitly cites her sexuality occurring within the context of a dance club. The song’s recorded narrative establishes a parallel reality to that of the live dancer on the floor. The dancer thus becomes a mimetic extension of the song’s story and is called upon to act it out by dancing with other bodies in the club.

Dancers often lip-synch or sing along to songs they know, hence, further extending the music’s narrative performance into a speech act (Austin, 1962; Butler, 1990, 1993). Madonna’s “Music” (2000) (“Hey Mr. D.J.//Put a record on//I wanna dance with my ba-by”), Missy Elliot’s “Get Your Freak On” (2001) (“Now people gather round, now people jump around”) and Janet Jackson’s “All for You” (2001) (“All my girls at the party//Look at that body//Shakin’ that thing like you never did see”) function in similar ways. Similarly, Taio Cruz’s “Come on Girl” (2008) elicits, “I love how you shake that little booty around the club.” These lyrics perform a sexual immediacy that depends on dance floor illusions such as the “DJ,” “records,” “party,” and “club.” Further, the lyrics of the songs help script the act of dancing onto the dancer’s body, shaping choreographic flirtations and desires and encouraging the sexual possession of other dancers’ bodies.

Besides performing the lyrics’ narrative script, pop songs also function as choreographic instructions to dancers. When the lyric of possession or seduction occurs, such as Janet Jackson’s “Got a nice package all right//Guess I’m gonna have to ride it tonight”

("All For You"), the dancer on the floor has the narrative justification to approach another dancer and engage in mutual choreography, often with choreographic movements focusing on the crotch area. Similarly, when Missy Elliott sings, "now people gather round, now people jump around," people on the dance floor (i.e., groups of men) find the justification to execute synergetic movements of gathering and jumping. A dance floor's crowd morphology is thus directly influenced by the explicit sexual and choreographic technologies encased in the lyrics and rhythms of pop music.

Schechner (1985) calls this type of collaborative nature a "collective special theatrical life" (p. 11) that can create a trance-effect. The familiarity with the songs' lyrics and rhythms provides dancers with a greater ability to repeat the choreographic narratives embedded in the music, "as if the security of repetition frees the dancer's imagination" (p.11). We argue that it is within this realm of increased imagination and self-transcendence that codes of gender expression and interaction can be most provocatively exploited and played up-on.

Conclusion

Dance floors, and in particular university dance floors, or clubs that cater to university students, function as social training grounds for gender expression where young people rehearse and repeat various modes of gender construction and play upon discursive sexual economies. In contrast to Butler's theory of gender repetition, we contend that it is within the excessive repetition characteristic to dance floors that a dancer can exercise individual agency and a sense of originality. Paradoxically, it is within the redundant and excessive repetitions of dance that liberating gaps may open up for imaginative experimentations with gender and sexuality. These improvised moments can contain movements that rupture many of the traditional gender and sexual norms that the dancer would otherwise not embody under other conditions. Through the various gender technologies located in the terrain of a dance club, dancers etch out new forms and meanings of gender and sexuality.

In her book *Impossible Dance*, Fiona Buckland (2002) calls the process of reformulating a dance club into a utopian gender-variant realm the act of “queer world-making.” Her idea points to the imaginative potential and subversive agency dancers can possess in reshaping codes of gender and sexuality. “The impulse to dance,” Buckland writes, “reveal[s] a desire to compose a version of the self that moves out of its prescribed column and dances all over the map” (p. 93). In communities that have been historically relegated to the margins, “queer world-making” becomes a critical strategy of resistance and subject formation.

But we argue that despite occupying social spheres of heteronormative privilege, self-identified heterosexuals are performing comparable strategies of utopian subject formation. Perhaps finding the rigid requisites of hegemonic masculinity imprisoning, men on British university dance floor spaces today transgress orthodox customs of normative gender roles. They explore homosocial interactions otherwise policed by heteromascularity and heteronormativity. Here, university students embody this desire through gender transgressions and queer interventions. They reflect a gender zeitgeist in which to participate in male bonding, it is acceptable, enjoyable, and sometimes important to perform same-sex dances together, erotically touch one another and sometimes even to kiss. Effectively, these students are reformulating the university’s masculine peer culture, making their own queer world where their same-sex desires and enjoyments can find expression within a new framework.

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