"Fun and Carefree Like My Polka Dot Bowtie": Disidentifications of Trans*masculine Students of Color

Men and masculinities studies in higher education, as well as emergent scholarship on the experiences of trans* college students, have been expanding in recent years. Both strands have significant gaps that in combination reify the gender binary, hegemonic masculinity, and singular non-intersectional narratives that leave trans*masculine students of color largely absent from our literature and our consciousness as higher education scholars and practitioners. A phenomenological study investigated how trans*masculine college students understand, define and adopt a masculine identity, and how their various and salient intersecting identities inform their masculinities. Out of 19 total participants in the study, 11 identified as trans*masculine people of color. This chapter highlights their stories and experiences of resilience, resistance, and reconstructions of racialized (trans*)masculinities.

The pathways are intentionally titled *(trans*)masculine* rather than either *trans*masculine* or *masculine*. The presence of *trans** in the pathways' names honors the role that the students' trans*ness played in informing their conceptions and experiences of gender. The parenthetical disruption between *trans** and *masculine* allows for two understandings to be made: (a) that these pathways are possibilities for all types of masculine people, not just trans*masculine individuals, and (b) that for these students trans*ness and masculinity are not necessarily always integrated and fused, but might exist independent of each other in certain contexts.

By centering trans*masculine students of color and their understandings of masculinity, this chapter advances an intersectional and transformative investigation of masculinity from the perspective of those who figuratively and/or literally move across genders. Doing so validates trans* students' lives, perspectives, and resilience. Such validation is important if we are to improve trans* students' sense of belonging, involvement, persistence, and academic success on campus, and shift the oppression that trans* students face on hostile campuses. Additionally, such unique perspective offers all of us much in the pursuit of liberatory gendered and raced possibilities. This chapter will present the many "pathways" these students have pursued, the role higher education institutions – including dominant institutionalized and college masculinities – have played in their journeys, and how their narratives can inform future practice and scholarship. By considering masculinity from a divergent perspective, these students' reflections on their experiences offer us much in the pursuit of meaning.

Relevant Terminology

The terms most used and relevant in this chapter are trans* and trans*masculine. This chapter uses *trans** to refer to people whose gender identity does not align to one's sex assigned at birth as expected socially. The asterisk at the end of the term is used to "open up *transgender* or *trans* to a greater range of meanings" (Tompkins, 2014, p. 26), specifically inclusion of gender nonconforming identities, such as genderqueer, agender, and many others. Similarly, the asterisk in *trans*masculine* expands on terms such as trans man or female-to-male, to include a broader range of individuals who were assigned female at birth, identify as trans*, and with masculinity in some way. Finally, this chapter uses the term *cisgender* or *cis* to describe those who generally experience alignment between their assigned sex at birth and their gender identity. The creation and use of the term is important, as it emerged from within trans* communities to challenge positioning cisgender people as normal, traditional, or biological, and thus trans* people as not any of those things (Aultman, 2014).

Conceptual Framework

The literature review and the study were informed by a conceptual framework situated in hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005) and genderism (Bilodeau, 2009). These contexts are recognized and challenged through the lenses of critical trans politics (Spade, 2011), disidentification (Muñoz, 1999), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), and theory as liberatory practice (hooks, 1994). Finally, these lenses are further supplanted and biased by my own gender journey and identities. I am a trans*man of color, employing both in-group and out-group lenses to both the topic and the study's participants. I share commonality as a trans*masculine person of color with all the students in this chapter. As a Middle Eastern person who did not grow up in the U.S., my gendered journey is racialized in particular ways. Additionally, as someone that adopts the moniker of "man" and presents as masculine pretty consistently (through attire and secondary sex characteristics that are socially designated as masculine) my gendered journey is also gendered in particular ways. These intersectional aspects of my identities provide me with an out-group lens for many of the study participants, but not all. To continue to check for biases and false analyses based on these concurrent in- and out-group statuses, I consistently journaled throughout the study in order to acknowledge and then set aside my lens. This allowed me to be fully present and be able to hear participants as they wished to be heard.

Hegemonic masculinity and genderism are part of the social and institutional context in which trans*masculine students understand themselves and the world around them, including within higher education institutions. Hegemonic masculinity is "the pattern of practice… that allowed men's dominance over women to continue" (Connel & Messerschimdt, 2005, p. 832), as well as over subordinated masculinities that do not meet patriarchal standards (Connell, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is invisible, ubiquitous, and is maintained and reconstructed by all genders simply by continuing to perform gender-scripted behaviors and practices. Genderism – also referred to as cissexism or cisgenderism – is a cultural and systemic ideology that regulates gender as an essentialized binary based on sex assignment at birth (Bilodeau, 2009). It pathologizes and denigrates nonconforming gender identities through binary sorting and privileging of conforming identities, punishing nonconformity, and isolating gender nonconforming people and identities.

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) seeks to name and deconstruct the interlocked nature of systems of oppression. Building off intersectionality, queer people of color's realities offer disidentification (Muñoz, 1999), a political act of resistance that creates new truths rather than either adopting the dominant reality or opposing it entirely. Critical trans politics (Spade, 2011) further challenges mainstream assumptions that institutional structures are neutral, but rather that administrative systems such as higher education institutions constantly reproduce dominant meanings and boundaries of gender. These lenses taken singularly and together examine and critique intersecting systems of power and pursue transformative theory that aims to enact practices for liberation (hooks, 1994). Finally, as a trans*masculine person of color, I am invested in the narratives and conceptions of gender like my own and believe that the exclusion of our multi-faceted realities impacts the matriculation, persistence, success, and well-being of trans* people of color in higher education.

Literature Review

Studying men and masculinities began in the 1970s and 1980s, a profeminist endeavor to respond to the men's rights movement. The latter was a conservative backlash to gains made by feminist women and movements up to that point (Brod, 1987; Clatterbaugh, 1990). Thus studying "men *as men*" (Shapiro, 1981, p. 122) is still fairly emerging, with the focus on college men barely a couple of decades old (Capraro, 2004). Despite the fact that much of the foundational research used in higher education is based on men's development (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010), men's gender as a construct or process was not examined, thus necessitating the need to study college men's experiences from a gendered perspective (Davis & Laker, 2004; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris & Barone, 2011). The literature in higher education thus far overwhelmingly demonstrates that masculinity is associated with violence, harm, and mismanagement of health, both for men themselves and others in their lives (Connell, 2005; Courtenay, 2000/2011; O'Neil, 2008; O'Neil & Crapser, 2011; Kimmel, 2008/2010; Kimmel & Davis, 2011).

Despite the growing attention to masculinities on college campuses, and the importance of discussing masculinities in their plurality (e.g., Harper & Harris, 2010; Laker & Davis, 2011), these studies are overwhelmingly driven by and about cisgender men. This falsely assumes that masculinity is the exclusive domain of cisgender men (Person, 1999), particularly when terms like *man*, *male*, and *masculinity* are used interchangeably (Marine, 2013). In addition to masculine-identified or -expressing women (Person, 1999), these studies leave out the experiences and understandings of trans* students who have crucial perspectives to offer. By essentializing masculinity as something only cisgender men embody, these studies reify the gender binary and inadvertently maintain the supremacy of hegemonic masculinity (Bilodeau, 2009; Connell, 2005; Lev, 2004).

In addition to expanding scholarship on men and masculinities in higher education, the increasing visibility of trans* students at U.S. higher education institutions has enlightened the need for more research exploring their experiences and perspectives (Beemyn, 2003; Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005). However, this research is limited partly due to the assumption that trans* students are included in LGBTQ research, which is often not the case (Renn, 2010). Even when they are included as participants, most of the scholarship does not differentiate between sexuality and gender, further inappropriately assuming that trans* students' experiences and needs parallel those of their cisgender lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer peers (Marine, 2011; Pusch, 2003; Renn & Reason, 2013). Most of the existing research points to and emphasizes the oppression and hostility that trans* students face on college campuses (e.g. Bilodeau, 2009; Beemyn, 2003; Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005; Rankin, Blumenfeld, Weber, & Frazer, 2010). In addition to being limited as a whole, research on trans* students aggregates the population, leaving the diversity of gender, racial, and all other intersecting identities amongst them unacknowledged. This practice of mass aggregation of trans* students present them as a monolithic group, one that is assumed to be White, heterosexual, able-bodied and so forth. Specifically as it relates to race, the intersection of racism and genderism invisibilizes trans* students of color and their identities even more so (Bilodeau, 2009), which is then made worse by the dearth of narratives and perspectives coming from this population. Additionally, this practice of ignoring race and racism as it informs the experiences of trans* people, situates Whiteness as the norm in trans* literature (Bonilla-Silva, 2009). Thus, the intentional recruitment of trans* students of color, as well as an explicitly intersectional and raced lens in the study was important to resist the ongoing "whitewashing" of trans* realities.

Methodology

The study utilized qualitative post-intentional phenomenology (Vagle, 2014) and queer phenomenology (Ahmed, 2006) in order to open up traditional phenomenology to multiplicity and difference. This allowed the study to resist forming a singular essence of trans* masculinity and allowed for divergent voices of trans*masculine students to come through. Through maximum variation and selective sampling, a diverse pool of interested participants were interviewed in person or via Skype or phone anywhere between 40 minutes to two hours. From the group of 19 study participants, 11 identified as people of color and this chapter focuses on their narratives. A table describing each individual participant across the identities provided by them is provided (see Appendix A). The names listed are pseudonyms provided and/or approved by the participants themselves. The participants were also given the opportunity to write in their own descriptors for their various identities rather than selecting from pre-chosen options, which is reflected in the table except where the information provided was too long to include in its entirety. The 11 students were diverse racially, regionally, and in terms of their gender identities and ability/disability statuses. Most identified as queer, and socioeconomically all participants identified as middle class or with less means. Only two attended private institutions, with one – Seth – attending a historically women's college. Four were graduate students and seven were undergraduates. The institutions they attended were spread out across four U.S. regions – South (4), Northeast (2), West (3), and Midwest (2).

Data was analyzed using post-intentional phenomenology's whole-part-whole method (Vagle, 2014). This began with an initial holistic reading of the data to get a sense of the whole picture, followed by line-by-line readings of each transcript at a time. In addition to my own identification of excerpts and quotes, transcript readers were recruited who helped contribute to the final analysis. The final analysis allowed for the emergence of findings that were not thematic, but rather in the form of a threshold and pathways as described in the next section.

Findings

The emergence of the study's findings as a threshold and pathways disputes notions of a singular trans*masculinity or trans*masculine experience, including for trans*masculine students of color. The pathways describe the limitless paths or possibilities of (trans*)masculinities that students take on, and which exist within the contexts of hegemony and dominance, as depicted in Appendix B. The pathways are not independent of these contexts, but rather offer alternatives within them. These pathways are reached through the threshold of dominant masculinities, which function as a sort of passageway or entry point, and is shown as the blue area encircling the pathways (Appendix B). When reflecting on what masculinity means, dominant masculinities were often the first things that came up, demonstrating how ubiquitous and institutionalized they are as trans*masculine students of color seek to define and construct their identities. These dominant and hegemonic examples presented themselves at both individualized and institutionalized levels.

The pathways represent the disidentified (trans*)masculinities that the students in the study took on to (re)define their gendered identities as informed by their intersecting identities. The pathways are not sequentially explored and do not represent a developmental model of sorts. Meaning, trans*masculine students do not start with racialized (trans*)masculinities and arrive at authenticity. Rather the pathways emerge and re-emerge at different times in students' lives, can occur concurrently and are not mutually exclusive, are rarely if ever completely resolved, and become more integrated and complex over time. The way the pathways inform each other is somewhat like taking multiple classes at a time, allowing learnings from one inform another and

future ones, and with each semester/quarter students' approaches to assignments and content become increasingly fused and multidimensional. The study as a whole unearthed the following pathways and subpathways, which are illustrated in Appendix B as red arrows:

- Racialized (trans*)masculinities – a significant focus of this chapter, this pathway demonstrates how students' masculinities interact with their racialized identities and experiences, including the systems of oppression that shape those identities and experiences.
  - (Trans*)masculinities of color
  - White (trans*)masculinities
- Reoriented (trans*)masculine embodiments – this pathway explores the ways participants deconstructed and reconstructed their masculinities, with their identities being in constant formation and negotiation mode as they became exposed to scripts they learned or unlearned. Fashion, sexuality and relationships, disability, and non-binary identities often informed how this pathway was embodied.
  - Fashioned (trans*)masculinities
  - Sexua-romanticized (trans*)masculinities
  - (Dis)abled (trans*)masculinities
  - Non-binary (trans*)masculinities
- Authentic (trans*)masculinities – participants expressed strong desires to embody and redefine masculinities in authentic-to-them ways, that did not rely on prescriptive and restrictive performances of harmful scripts, just to be recognized as masculine and/or men. These authentic (trans*)masculinities required a balancing of gentleness (towards self and others) and intentional approaches to space, voice, and presence.
  - Intentional (trans*)masculinities
  - Gentle (trans*)masculinities

Although race and racism showed up across all the pathways, as well as within the threshold of dominance, this chapter focuses on how trans*masculine college students of color traversed their racialized pathways with specific attention to (trans*)masculinities of color and Black (trans*)masculinities, and the implications of their reflections. Additionally, some relevant attention is paid to their articulation of institutionalized masculinities and authentic (trans*)masculinities.

Institutionalized Masculinities

When thinking about how their institutions conveyed what masculinity meant, many trans*masculine students of color presented grim and toxic images of institutionalized masculinity that was broiled in misogyny and racism, among other systems of oppression. The enactment of dominant masculinities by their peers and individuals on campus was often named as reflective of the institutions themselves. Speaking to institutional masculine culture, RJ said, "Currently, like, this is horrible to say but the culture of [my institution], masculinity equals rape. It's bad shit; it's fucked up to say… There is a culture of, 'Who gives a shit,' or 'She was asking for it.'" This institutionalized framing and cissexist assumptions that all men are cisgender, left Kyle conflicted about his role as a man of transgender experience.

It's difficult because it's like I want to be able to engage in these conversations, but not knowing how to engage in these conversations. Not knowing how to balance the amount

of space I take up. Especially since I am like a hardcore feminist. I believe in the equality of genders. Knowing what that feels like to be seen and treated as a woman, but also transitioning to a more masculine manhood or whatever. I find it hard to find space for me to be able to have these conversations and not feel invalidated by them… I don't really know because I want to be loud, but I don't want to be demonized. I also don't want to be invisible and not say anything. I just have to pick and choose my battles. But most of the times, I feel like whichever battle I choose I lose.

In addition to seeing dominant masculinity as institutionalized and manifested in rape culture on campus, trans*masculine students of color also talked about the inevitable whiteness of institutional masculinity. Charles remarked that "We are in the rural Northwest so for me when I think of masculinity specifically here I see straight, White male-bodied, male-identified men." He also talked about how the institution's affinity spaces, such as the multicultural center or queer resource center "makes [the campus] seem like something that it's not" and function "sometimes [as] a veil." Thus, affinity spaces did not shift the institution's identity, nor did they structurally change the student population, but rather masked its whiteness and cisheteropatriarchy. Similarly, when thinking about his institution, Earl described it as "White. It's really, really White and as far as specifically about masculinity there are not a lot of men on campus that look like me." That meant that Earl did not consider anyone at the institution as someone that could fulfill an influential role in his life when it came to masculinity, because he did not see himself in those around him and,

it really sucks. It's seriously... I can't tell you ... For me when I think about masculinity I'm thinking about people that I can somehow identify with and it's really difficult for me to identify with a lot of the guys that I see on campus. Seriously, on a daily basis I might see one person that looks like me, if that.

Similarly, Kyle did not feel connected to "any of the authority" on his campus, minimally engaging with any of them, and did not see his institution as playing an influential role on his masculinity. When thinking about employees on campus, he shared that "There is a lot of respectability politics in being a teacher and staff member and stuff like that. And I don't respect that. I don't respect respectability politics." Respectability politics is a strategy that blames the behaviors and attitudes of Black people, particularly poor Black people, for structural inequality rather than racism, White supremacy, classism, and anti-blackness. Jay also disconnected himself from his institution, commenting on that reality's impact when he said, "It's like people [in higher education] don't have expectations of you as a Black man." When he talked about his on-campus engagement or lack thereof, he said,

I don't live on campus, I don't fuck with campus, I don't have anything to do with campus. I just go in, get my classes and go back to the south side with the other Black people and I'm good, you know what I'm saying? That's what I do. So I don't really… I'm immune to the bullshit, you know?

Jay and Kyle both also talked about experiencing anti-blackness in campus queer spaces when they began presenting as Black men. They experienced being perceived and treated as dangerous, suspicious, and threatening. Jay's relationships with White queer individuals he had previously been in community with began to strain when he physically transitioned. He said, "It was really interesting as I transitioned, as the changes started happening physically you know, going into spaces with White queer people and them being like, 'Who the fuck are you and why are you here Black man?'" Jay felt his masculinity get stripped of its queerness and trans*ness by others' interpretations of Black masculinity as inherently heterosexual and cisgender. On the

other hand, Kyle felt "ostracized" and experienced an erasure of his Blackness when he found himself in queer spaces. "I would talk about my queer experience and my trans* experience.... and other people would talk about their queer experience and their trans* experience, but then feeling like, 'Mine doesn't look the same as yours, cause I'm also Black.'"

Experiences of anti-blackness like these across institutional spaces, influenced how Earl performed his Black masculinity on campus, including in the classroom. He found himself attempting to "not be the angry Black guy" when in predominantly White environments "with no backup or support." Earl lets "a lot of things go unsaid" and found this performance "exhausting." As an example,

> In [the health equity] class I just didn't say a lot and a lot of times it was really hard to show up to class. It got to the point to where I did my work, I turned in my assignments, but going to that class was a chore. Just kind of like hearing people talk about these different situations or experiences they have had that were like 'eye opening' and I was like if I hear one more person say eye opening I'm going to jump out the fucking window.

> At Coffee Bean's institution, institutionalized White masculinity, along with classism, all coalesced into "dude-bro" masculinity. They described a dude-bro as "a White fraternity dude, upper class of course."

> I think of someone who is in 'Fiji' [Phi Gamma Delta] and 'Sammy' [Sigma Alpha Mu]. I think of someone who is obnoxious, someone who is entitled. And that's White masculinity, right, because for me, especially coming to [my institution], it was hard for me to disentangle whiteness from upper class-ness…. And when we get to masculinity of color, because there's a very clear difference, a very clear divide between the two, I think of some of the Black dudes I know on campus, that most of them, unfortunately, I know because they're football players and how fucked up it is that most of the Black students that you recruit and that you give scholarships to are the ones that are going to make you money as football stars or as basketball players.

The association of whiteness and masculinity with each other, meant Jones held up his Asian male peers to White masculine standards. He described one of his classmates as "very Americanized and he's attractive, very conventionally attractive for an Asian guy. He's buff and he's very social and very cool" and he felt "inferiority compared to him." Another classmate he described as "more approachable to me" and as "nerdier, definitely scrawnier. I think he's more Asian-y than the other guy." Thus, Jones equated being attractive, strong, and cool as a man to being "Americanized," meaning White, and being skinny and nerdy as Asian qualities, ones he was not intimidated by and saw himself being like. Thus, "dude-bro masculinity" is something that Jones, as an Asian trans*masculine person could not and did not want to attain.

(Trans*)masculinities of color

Trans*masculine students of color explicitly and implicitly named some of the ways they experienced whiteness, white supremacy, and racism as roadblocks in their desire to witness or embody positive and culturally affirming representations of masculinities. They brought up colonialism, respectability politics, anti-blackness, and being seen as threats as racialized beings as mediating forces in their experience of masculinities within society as a whole, as well as their own racial and cultural communities. Coffee Bean struggled with their own self-identification as trans* because "even thinking about trans*ness for me has to be disentanglement from whiteness." Students talked about how this *en*tanglement resulted in decisions about cutting

their hair in culturally non-affirming ways (Charles), in linguistic barriers when communicating with family about trans*ness in Spanish (Seth), a polluting of Lakota masculinity with misogynistic practices (Bastian), and a desire to decolonize machismo (RJ).

As social institutions that are not immune to and which often propagate white supremacy, racism, and colonialism – always in collusion with other forces such as cissexism – trans*masculine students of color experienced hostile environments on campus. Mohammad talked about the intersectional impact of racism, Islamophobia, and masculinity that he experienced as a Palestinian masculine student involved in pro-Palestinian activism on campus.

> My Palestinian [identity] and masculinity intertwined is very interesting in terms of like opposition. The Zionist group on campus, they're very much into LGBTQ rights. But then also they're like quick to label me more as a terrorist. This happened during a divestment [hearing], where I was like accused of carving a swastika into a dorm room, which they never provided evidence of, any pictures or anything. Also I was called a terrorist during the actual hearing. I think that because of my masculinity it's more, it's easier to call me that, a terrorist, than it is for the female Palestinians. Where they're just like, they say that [female Palestinians are] oppressed or they support terrorism, rather than being terrorists.

However, it was precisely his involvement and leadership in culturally-specific activism and spaces that allowed for Mohammad to find acceptance among his cis peers. Describing himself as "one of the most active Arabs" in his community, he positioned himself among his peers to be "the first person they call… when something about Arabs or Muslims comes up in [town]." He believed,

> …that has a lot to do with why they respect me too… I think that I'm also changing stereotypes for them. Because I am so deeply passionate in change and human rights, and Palestine that they're like, 'Oh well not all LGBTQ people are on floats throwing glitter. They actually care about stuff. They're humans too.'

Despite experiencing resistance to their trans*ness in their sorority, Coffee Bean brought up the organization's history and values, specifically its race-centered activist roots, as a reason they joined in the first place. This was connected to their own personal history and values, the significance of their socialization as a woman of color and anti-misogynistic ideals.

> There's also a part of me that's not interested in denying the fact that I was socialized as a woman of color or that I at some point said yeah I'm a girl, you know what I mean? I don't identify that as like now necessarily, but I feel like it's almost misogynistic in its own way… to deny the fact that at some point in my life, I was a girl… That's real and that shapes me and that's who I was and that will always be a little part of who I am and I think that also informed some of my reason for joining [my sorority].

Trans*masculine students of color often found solace, wholeness, identification, and affirmation when engaging with people of color that lived out diverse presentations and expressions of gender, as well as when they reflected on the messages they received about masculinity from their own communities. This rarely, if ever, occurred at or through their own institutions. A few participants, for example, were alums of the Oakland-based Brown Boi Project (BBP) and had participated in BBP's Leadership Retreat. None of the alums had participated in the retreat in the same cohort as others in the study. BBP is an organization for masculine of center people of color across gender identities who seek and embody non-oppressive masculinities. Charles, who at the time of his participation had not yet begun identifying as trans*, talked about the impact of that space.

We all identified as masculine of center. We were all people of color. I think seeing the spectrum in which you can be within that which is so vast, it was really like, oh my god I think this person that I'm seeing in front of me is like a physical manifestation of all of the feelings that I have and I just didn't know it was possible. So it was such a powerful thing.

Kyle's participation in BBP gave him a vehicle through which to reconnect to his own Cherokee roots. The retreat shifted his perspective on gender by triggering a connection to

the different tribes that existed that actually understood that masculinity and femininity are fluid, [that] they flow into each other rather than just being binary or either side of the spectrum… I think that if it wasn't for Brown Bois I would probably still have that anxiety, that pressure, to be rigid, to be cold, to try to be hard and all that other stuff. I guess getting connected back to the ancestry that says this never existed before colonialization (sic). This wasn't a part of our culture. We don't even understand what that means... is what kind of transformed my view of what masculinity means to me and what it can mean in another context.

In addition, one of Kyle's mentors, a community-based activist who "was the first Black trans*man that I ever met," introduced him to the idea of the Black intellectual. Where society, his classes, and student organizations sent him confining and limiting messages about the ability of his identities to coexist in his Black trans* body, this Black-centered mentorship allowed Kyle to reinterpret Black masculinity and embody a counter-narrative. It helped him internalize being "a Black man, and that doesn't mean that I will not succeed, or that I am not anything, but I have potential, and I can be an intellectual and I can make change happen."

Finding someone like him also played a big role for James in crafting his masculinity. Incidentally, James was the only trans*masculine student of color to both find this person within a campus context and to name a cisgender person as being 'like him.' When pledging his poetry fraternity, the president of the organization was his inductions master and quickly became someone that James looked up to and sought to emulate. As others in the fraternity began calling James a "mini Sam[1]" and the two of them became close, he began to feel at ease about his gender around Sam, allowing Sam the opportunity to affirm James' gender.

When I told him [that I'm trans*] he was like, I've been calling you brother since I met you, which is true. He was immediately like 'you're like a little brother to me, for some reason you don't feel like a little sister.' So when I told him that I wanted male pronouns he was like, at this point that's only natural and he never slips up or anything.

James' trust in Sam, a cishet Black man, to open up to about being trans male, added more pull for James towards Black masculinity. It is where he found affirmation as personified by Sam, and likely heightened through their membership and sense of brotherhood within a fraternity. Beyond individual connection, others talked about connections to community and culture as affirming and building their sense of selves. For Bastian this occurred in witnessing change in Lakota masculinity, a going back to historical and pre-colonial understandings of gender in North America, ones that honored non-binary genders. Some of this he believed to be in tandem with shifts in the broader trans* community. Having deep historical roots to begin with, he experienced Two Spirit communities as more embracing of gender fluidity than other communities.

I also think that as the trans* community is beginning to accept more of a fluidity of gender and the general community is starting to accept that, that the Two Spirit

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[1] Pseudonym for James' inductions master

community is going through a similar change. But I feel like [the Two Spirit community] might have gotten there just a little bit before the other communities did. That gender is a little more understood as being fluid I guess a little earlier. I like how seamlessly a lot of the members are able to switch from gender to gender.

RJ talked about being in touch with their own ancestors and cultural identity "like Taíno and Arawak folk and Puerto Rican-ness" and "loving and affirming Black trans*women" as a "beautiful process of decolonizing" and as "survival." They acknowledged this process was hard, a feeling that Jones resonated with when it came to existing at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities, alongside the feeling of being enriched by that existence. He talked about how his gender (transmasculine) and race (Korean-American) "have been the two biggest factors" in shaping him.

Growing up in [Southern home state] as one of two Asian kids at school you had nobody to mirror you. I had nobody else to look at and oh yeah I'm part of that group. So it's definitely enriched my life culturally in terms of my world view. I'm more understanding of minority status due to my intersecting minority identities. Yet it has also made my life very difficult. I think I had more heartbreak than a normal kid would if they grew up White and straight and stuff in [Southern home state]. I had more stuff to deal with growing up.

Both Jones and Mohammad talked about the ways their particular upbringings imbued them with certain cultural understandings of masculinity that allowed them to resist "American" – which they often used interchangeably with White – masculine ideals. Mohammad brought up the cultural imagery of the *amo*, Arabic for uncle, as the source of his sense of responsibility towards his community as tired to his privileged identities. Pointing to a painting of an amo carrying Jerusalem on his wall, Mohammad described his masculinity as

carrying the weight of everything. Being able to help out and carry the weight off people. I would describe my masculinity as giving to others. It's what makes me the happiest in life, is when I'm able to give to others. Not necessarily synonymous with masculinity, but for me it is. It's having the ability, having the privilege to help others. Using my privilege and accessibility to do so.

Jones also held that there were contradicting messages he got about masculinity between "Asian culture" and "American people."

I feel like inherent in Asian culture is kind of this humility and respect thing. So it's hard to be the aggressive masculine that I see a lot in American people. So no matter how much I try to be, not that I would try to be, but like I don't think I have it in me to be American masculine.

Authentic (trans*)masculinities

Trans*masculine students of color thus contended with notions of masculinity tied with whiteness and racism as they attempted to embody and redefine masculinities in was that felt authentic to them, ones that did not involve performing restrictive, prescriptive, and harmful scripts just to be recognized as masculine and/or as men. As previously shared, connections to culture and history, as well as individuals and communities of color allowed them to reground themselves in their genders. Mohammad, another BBP alum, talked about the significance of meeting a gender diverse group of masculine of center people of color that affirmed to him that "bois cry too." For him, this "was the first time that I actually was told that it's okay to be my

authentic self and be okay with it…. to be a masculine person who's sensitive… in touch with their feminine side, whatever that is."

These authentic ways of being involved being intentional in crafting their masculinities. This often meant being conscious of space and voice, and as Coffee Bean described, embodying a masculinity that was "accountable… ethical… without misogyny… just fun and carefree like my polka dot bowtie." This bowtie symbolized their masculinity, because "the way I've placed it and everything, it's masculine, but it's got polka dots on it so it's kind of fruity." They talked about their disidentification with masculinity as wanting "to have the bowties and suspenders and have the flat chest and have all this other stuff… but I want to do all of that without the cloying paternalism." Coffee Bean embraced their masculinity, while rejecting aspects of hegemonic masculinity they were expected to take on.

Authenticity for Seth meant being "more honest" with those around him, and this they believed allowed him to "have stronger bonds with people, because they appreciate when you are honest with them." Ze believed that revealing his trans* identity to others made people "almost… more invested in you than they would otherwise be." For others still authenticity was about being gentle and centering vulnerability in masculinity (RJ and Charles), talking about hurt and pain with other masculine people (Kyle), embracing their femininity (Jones, Mohammad, and Charles), and self-care (RJ, Kyle, Charles, and Coffee Bean). As Kyle internalized deserving "healthy living [and] care," he learned how to be "a lot more supportive in healthier ways… not forget[ting] about myself in these larger movements, while also supporting [and advocating for] other people as well."

Discussion

The reflections of trans*masculine students of color divulge incredible insight into how the collusion of multiple systems of oppression come to shape their experiences and identities at the intersections of their marginalized and privileged identities. These reflections have implications for campus educators throughout the institution, from those working in LGBTQ resource centers, to classroom instructors, from those who implement programming for men of color, to those who seek to address the campus epidemic of sexual assaults. Often these environments design curricular and co-curricular interventions in isolation from each other, focusing on a single dimension of students' lives.

LGBTQ campus spaces have much work to do to eradicate racism, particularly anti-blackness, if they are to be a resource on campus for trans*masculine students of color. Classroom instructors of all disciplines ought to learn to employ anti-oppressive pedagogy (Kumashiro, 2002). Without such pedagogical practices, students like Earl who disengages because of the racism and cissexism they experience in the classroom, are cheated out of transformational classrooms and are misevaluated as being disinterested in academic endeavors. Trans*masculine students of color have also shared about the power of being in community with other masculine people of color, something they overwhelmingly do not experience on their campuses, even though many campuses provide 'men of color' programming. Often these programs aim to increase the retention of men of color, as well as create dialogue about positive masculinities. In addition to not considering trans*masculine students as potentially benefitting from and desiring such spaces, the counter-narratives shared and crafted by many of these students stand in opposition to racist attributions of danger, threat, and violence that plague masculine people of color, particularly Black men on campus. Cisgender men of color are thus denied the counter-narratives of trans*masculine students of color, as well as their unique

understanding of how masculine/male privilege and hegemonic masculinity show up. Exposure to these students' articulations of resisting the aforementioned forces could embolden men of color to take even more responsibility in the efforts to eradicate rape culture on campus.

Implications of the articulated realities of trans*masculine students of color go beyond programmatic and practice-related efforts that can benefit all students on college campuses. This study challenges how trans* students as a whole, and trans*masculine students of color specifically, are viewed on college campuses as a population that has to be accommodated. This deficit-oriented viewpoint names trans* students as anomalies or problems to otherwise seemingly well-functioning institutions. Instead, this study radically positions trans*masculine students of color, and their insights and contributions, as assets to institutions that are truly invested in enacting social change.

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Appendix A

Name	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Sexuality	(Dis)ability	SES	G/UG	Inst. Type & Region
RJ	Transgender, masculine-of-center, genderqueer	Boricua, Latinx	Pansexual	Disabled	Working class	G	South, Private
Kyle	Man of transgender experience	Black Cherokee	Queer	None	Working poor	UG	South, Public
Seth	Transmasculine	Latino	Pansexual	Occasional anxiety	Lower middle class	UG	West, Private
Earl	Queer	African-American	Queer	None	Poor	G	West, Public
James	Transmale	White, Black, Native American, and Asian	Queer	None	Middle class	UG	Northeast, Public
Bastian	Two Spirit transman	Lakota Jew (multi-ethnically White)	Heteroflexible, sapioromantic, demisexual	Multiple disabilities	Living in poverty	G	Midwest, Public
Jones	Transmasculine	Korean-American	Queer	None	Low middle class	G	South, Public
Mohammad	Transgender man/boi	Palestinian Middle Eastern	Loves femmes	None	Lower middle class	UG	South, Public
Charles	Trans*man, transgender man, FTM	Japanese, Hawaiian, Chinese, Irish, Portuguese, and possibly English	Attracted to femininity in all its forms	None	Middle(ish) working class	UG	West, Public
Jay	Transman	Black	Queer	Yes?	Working class	UG	Midwest, Public
Coffee Bean	Trans*masculine non-binary	Latin@, NicaMexiGreek	Queer	PTSD	Working class	UG	Northeast, Public

Appendix B

Threshold of Pathways
(Dominant Masculinities)

Hegemonic Masculinity

Patriarchy

Trans*masculine
pathways

Genderism