Navigating the workplace: gay white men in corporate America

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Navigating the workplace: Gay white men in corporate America

by

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A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Sociology

Program of Study Committee:
Cynthia Anderson, Major Professor
Sharon Bird
Jacquelyn Litt
Jill Bystydzienski
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Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2004

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Graduate College
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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation of

Shaun Bryant Keister

has met the dissertation requirements of Iowa State University

Signature was redacted for privacy.

Major Professor

Signature was redacted for privacy.

For the Major Program
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people deserve thanks for all the support they offered me throughout the process of conceptualizing, researching and writing this manuscript. First and foremost, I must extend a great deal of appreciation and admiration to Cindy Anderson who served as not only my major professor and dissertation committee chair, but also as my mentor, friend, cheerleader, and at times my 'kick-in-the-pants.' Others on my dissertation committee were instrumental in helping me conceptualize, fine-tune and complete this body of research. A special thanks to Sharon Bird, Jackie Litt, Jill Bystydzienski, and Leslie Bloom for their assistance, advice and service.

Over a period of nearly a decade, as I worked my way through graduate school, many people at Iowa State University served as inspiration. On the academic side of my life, I'd like to acknowledge Cindy Anderson, Jackie Litt, and Sharon Bird for broadening my viewpoints on life both in the classroom and beyond, and facilitating the development of my passions relative to studying and researching sexual orientation. In addition, Betty Dobratz, Ed Munoz, Gloria Jones Johnson, and Robert Mazur were and are incredible faculty members whose commitment to the sociology discipline I deeply respect.

In a professional capacity, I would like to also thank my colleagues and supervisors over the years who fully supported my other passion in life—sociology. While working full-time with the ISU Foundation, many people provided support that helped me get through graduate school and survive the writing of this manuscript. I respectfully acknowledge: Phyllis Lepke, Debra Engle, Tom Mitchell, Dan Saftig, Rosemary Sokolik, and all my friends at the foundation.
I also express my appreciation to all the gay men who were willing to participate in this study so that our collective voices can be heard and so we are at the table as part of the sociological and cultural debate that continues in our society. Your participation serves our communities, and for that I am forever grateful.

There are always those people who come in and out of your life that serve as inspiration and daily reminders of life’s great possibilities. I have a long list of friends who have touched me in many ways throughout my life, and I would like to thank them all for their love and support. Most of all, a small group of friends, who I consider to be my family, have been with me every step of the way. Their love and friendship has moved and inspired me on countless occasions, and I would not be the person I am today without them. A very special thanks to Dwayne Beliakoff, Joe Stuckey, Carlos Toledo, John Waugh, and Sammy Tanner. I am blessed that each of you has come into my life. We came of age together as gay men and we will grow old together as gay men.

Finally, I want to thank Walter Allen, my life partner. I cherish the day you walked into my life and gave it new meaning. You inspire me. You bring laughter to my life. You remind me of what is important. Through our life and love together I have found the courage to live more fully and the faith that two people can love one another completely. In the words of Paul Monette “the tortuous journey that brings you to love, all the twists and near misses. Somehow it’s all had a purpose, once you’re finally real. Proof that all of us got that far-free from the traps and the lies. And from that moment on the brink of summer’s end, no one would ever tell me again that men like me couldn’t love.” I dedicate this manuscript to you, Walter.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION – GAY MEN AND THE WORKPLACE

Status of gays in the workplace

Dramatic challenges and changes for the gay and lesbian communities are altering the American social fabric and public opinion of our society. Gays and lesbians are experiencing in some cases rapid advancements, often including passage of anti-discrimination legislation, as well as some shocking setbacks, such as the Defense of Marriage Act and political pressure to pass a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage. Beginning with the Stonewall Riots in 1969, over the past three decades the gay and lesbian social movement has dealt with a wide range of issues such as housing discrimination, the AIDS crisis beginning in the 1980s, discrimination in the military which is on-going, and a host of other social justice issues, many of which are yet to be resolved and have impact on the daily lives of gays and lesbians. Few areas of individuals’ lives are more critical or have greater impact than our work lives, given the amount of time commitment we make to our jobs and careers, as well as the reality that in a capitalist society, the income provided by our work is an important measure of our security.

However, very little is known about the actual work lives of gays and lesbians other than the fact more workplaces have added sexual orientation to their non-discrimination policies in recent years. We do not know whether or not there are advantages or disadvantages of being “out” in the workplace, or even how gay men and lesbians make decisions about sharing or hiding their sexual orientation when at work. Since so much of our security depends on our work lives, it becomes increasingly important to look at whether
or not gays and lesbians face greater degrees of workplace discrimination, despite progressive policies, and to study how gay men and lesbians navigate their workplaces.

What we do know relative to public opinion is that a majority of Americans now believe it is fundamentally wrong to discriminate against gay men and lesbians in the workplace. Polls taken over the past decade have consistently shown that the vast majority of Americans are against employment discrimination. An August 1998 *New York Times* article cited the results of a poll conducted by Gallup and the Princeton Survey Research Associates for the Pew Research Center which found that a growing number think homosexuals should have equal job opportunity—84 percent in 1998 compared to 56 percent in 1977 (Berke 1998, 3). However, gays and lesbians are still banned from serving openly in the United States Armed Forces, and an actual increase has occurred in the number of servicemen and women being discharged for their sexual orientation since the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy of the 1990s.

Additionally, legal cases are brought forth by gay men and lesbians who claim to have experienced discrimination in the workplace based on sexual orientation. More Christian fundamentalist-owned businesses are opening, which rarely offer gay-friendly environments. While on the surface public opinion is against discriminatory practices against gays and lesbians in the workplace, there is still evidence that gay men and lesbians face challenges in the workplace. For instance, some employees refuse to sign the non-discrimination policies of their companies because they believe homosexuality is wrong. So, despite public sentiment, what has really changed in the workplace in recent history?
The Human Rights Campaign (HRC), a gay and lesbian lobbying group based in Washington D.C., reports an increase in gay-friendly activities and policies among the Fortune 500 companies in America. In fact, having monitored corporate behavior towards gays and lesbians since 1995 and establishing what they term the HRC Corporate Equality Index, HRC has found that

a majority of Fortune 500 companies have included sexual orientation in their non-discrimination policies. Today 64 percent of Fortune companies have those policies. The HRC Corporate Equality Index reveals that many of those companies have gone further in defining their action around GLBT diversity in the workplace. A majority of companies have taken other major steps toward creating an equal workplace, from diversity training to domestic partner benefits. (HRC 2004)

Some might argue this is encouraging news for gays and lesbians, at least in the corporate sector of the workforce. But are policies enough? Do policies at an organizational level positively impact individual workers in their everyday work lives?

Part of the answer to this question lies in further analysis of why these policies came into existence in the first place. Raeburn points to a workplace social movement with three distinct waves of workplace employee activism as a major reason for policy changes relative to gays and lesbians. She states that in the early 1990s the first wave of activists created visible workplace organizations aimed at

  effecting widespread institutional change. While most of the first wave networks had labored in relative isolation, gay employee groups that mobilized during the second period could draw courage, and improved networking opportunities, from the knowledge that they were not alone. (Raeburn 2004, 51)

Raeburn defines the second wave as occurring during 1990-1994, at which time workplace activists created inter-organizational linkages among gay employee networks.

  As the linkages among workplace employee activists grew increasingly dense and formalized the workplace experienced a certain coming of age. This period of
development came with its own set of tensions as leaders struggled over the type and degree of formalization that would best suit networking at the regional and national levels. (Raeburn 2004, 51)

Raeburn also argues that by the mid-1990s the workplace wing of the gay and lesbian movement had come of age.

... numerous umbrella groups, two national workplace projects, and an abundance of conferences and Web sites that focused on gay employment issues were all well established by the middle of the decade. Their continued presence signifies the successful institutionalization of the workplace movement. (Raeburn 2004, 51)

However, beginning in 1995, Raeburn acknowledges that the third wave of activism has slowed dramatically.

Raeburn also points out that activism alone did not create all the positive changes in corporate policies, but combined with other macro-level institutional opportunities including the passage of city ordinances banning workplace discrimination, corporate boycotts, lawsuits and shareholder activism. Additionally, she demonstrates that national gay and lesbian organizations began a major effort to publicize corporate gay-friendliness, which alone could influence corporate policies (even without activists organizing within the corporations). Raeburn ties this to the desire for corporations to remain competitive among themselves and to not appear to be “behind the curve.” Raeburn points out that many human resource paradigms also began theorizing the importance of diversity in the workplace, and as these messages gained legitimacy, more companies adopted gay-friendly policies. Finally, she argues that organizational realignments played a role in policy changes, particularly elite turnover and shifts in boards of directors' composition.

Another related theory on the changing attitudes of corporate America leaders toward gays and lesbians is the assumed market value of the communities. Badgett argues that
companies began searching for new markets in the early 1990s during a slack sales period. "The selling of the gay market was ready to hit the big time. Companies began to market their very mainstream products to lesbians and gay men" (Badgett 2001, 115). While Badgett states that the buying power of gays and lesbians may well be exaggerated, the assumptions of corporate America that this is a niche market to which they need to market and sell, may have also led these same corporations to rethink their policies toward gays and lesbians, making them more favorable in an effort to attract more gay and lesbian commerce. The labor shortages during the booming economy of the mid to late 1990s might also contribute to corporate policies favoring gays and lesbians. According to Winfeld and Spielman:

The benefit of progressive policies lies in attracting and retaining employees. For corporations, a supportive stance results in becoming an employer of choice for many people—not just gay people but for all concerned about a fair, equitable, and non-hostile work environment. (Winfeld and Spielman 1995, 8)

In one of the few comprehensive studies of gay men in the workplace conducted before these findings, James Woods in The Corporate Closet (1993) examined the workplace lives of seventy gay professional, and mostly middle-class, men. Woods studied the difficulty these gay men faced in choosing whether or not to be out or "in the closet" while at work. For the most part his study looks at how gay men masked their private lives during office hours, up to and including creating fictional straight lives in order to navigate and survive in the workplace. Woods’ research brings to life the negative ramifications the closet had on gay men’s ability to survive and thrive in the workplace, predicated mostly on their fears of losing their jobs and livelihood because of their sexual orientation. While his research was conducted in the latter part of the 1980s, it marked a significant time of change in the visibility of gay men and lesbians (and preceded the wave of workplace activism.
presented by Raeburn). With the AIDS crisis appearing in the 1980s, gay men (and lesbians) came out in great numbers and united their communities. In doing so, the level of visibility afforded to gays and lesbians was at a fever pitch, perhaps too visible for some (even within the gay and lesbian communities).

Arguably Woods conducted his research on closeted gay men at a pivotal time in gay and lesbian history, a period when public opinion was dramatically fluctuating, as well as a period of uncertainty for gays and lesbians as to where that public opinion was going to land. Since then, visibility has increased even more dramatically. As gay activist Michelangelo Signorile states, "So many people are openly gay that hiding has become less necessary, at least in places where coming out doesn't threaten one's safety or job. People used to be embarrassed to be out of the closet and now they're embarrassed to be in" (Wilson 1995, 27). Based on this statement, and assuming increased visibility is a good thing, one could argue that progress has been made relative to gay visibility in American culture in the past decade. Despite the recent macro-level analyses that indicate new gay-friendly policies, changing corporate attitudes, and the benefits of increased visibility, what do we know about how this has changed or impacted the individual (micro-level) lives of gays and lesbians within the workplace? The time has come to again conduct an in-depth exploration of the work lives of gay men and how they navigate their workplaces.

The importance of studying gay men

The lives of gay men and lesbians, while prevalent in pop culture, continue to be understudied, especially within academia. A quick search on any library database will bring
up a significant amount of literature on the gay communities, but only a small portion of what has been written about gays and lesbians can be wed to social science disciplines such as sociology or cross-functional disciplines such as women's studies. Butler (1991), Connell (1992), Epstein (1996), Fee (2000), Fuss (1991), Gamson (1996), Ingraham (1996), Kaufman (1994), Kimmel (1994), Nardi (2000), Plummer (1996), Raeburn (2004), Seidman (1996), Ward (2000), Weeks (1996), and others are among the small number of social scientists who have added sexual orientation to the research agenda in recent years. If sexual orientation is not further integrated into the social science disciplines, we run the risk of gay men and lesbians continuing to be invisible, despite their increased social visibility, in much social scientific debate and discourse. My own interests are tied to how established sociological theories can be enriched by adding sexual orientation into the research and analysis.

As a graduate student in sociology I often found myself questioning the pre-existing theories, particularly theories tied to gender, feminism, and masculinity. Rarely were gay men and lesbians studied as a subgroup of the larger male and female categories, which I always felt rendered these categories only partially valid. I would read article after article about difference and distinction between men and women, blacks and whites, lower and middle classes, blue collar and white collar workers, and other dichotomized groups. While I found studying and researching social inequality to be essential to better understanding why inequity exists in society, as a gay, white, middle-class man, I never could quite relate to the literature. Instead I always found myself challenging the validity of studies that lumped gay men with all other men or the life experiences of lesbians with those of other women. Being acutely aware of how different I felt in everyday life as a gay white man, and how obvious it
was to me that I was not exactly like other men, how could these theories represent my life experience? For the most part, I was invisible from the sociological literature and theories which professed to speak for and of me and others like me.

It was that classroom experience and academic journey as a gay man that led me to focus my own academic studies on gay men. I desperately wanted, and continue to want, to put gay men and lesbians into the sociological debate. This desire, coupled with an interest sparked by Woods', *The Corporate Closet*, compelled me to launch my own study of gay men in the workplace. However, I wanted to look at gay men in a different light. Having watched the gay communities change over the past decade and having entered the workforce myself in the early 1990s, I believed strongly that out gay men were experiencing something rather different than what Woods described and documented in his research on predominantly closeted gay men.

I have spent my entire professional and academic career as an out, often outspoken, gay man. My colleagues, supervisors, professors, and classmates have always known of my sexual orientation. While my career has been limited to the higher education administration field, over the past twelve-plus years, I can honestly say, to my knowledge, I have been fortunate enough to have not faced overt workplace discrimination. I am certain along the way I have made a handful of co-workers, perhaps even supervisors, a bit uncomfortable because of my sexual orientation. But in the bigger picture, I have always been able to work well with colleagues, advance myself professionally, and navigate the workplace in such a way that I have been able to play leadership roles within my office environments. I have been actively recruited by other universities and colleges and have received multiple
promotions with my current employer. Over the years, I have actually been surprised that my sexual orientation has not gotten in the way of professional advancement. I have assumed all along that I have just been lucky and that my own fortune is atypical for gay white men, particularly because I have witnessed colleagues struggle with coming out, or uncomfortable with sharing their sexual orientation with others in the workplace.

Along the way, I have worked for institutions that did not have sexual orientation included in their non-discrimination policies, and some that added it during my tenure. I was able to witness first-hand the workplace activism that created changes in policies which swept across the country in the late 1990s relative to non-discrimination and domestic partner benefits, but was never quite able to assess what impacts these policies were having on the gay men and lesbians around me. While I personally thought these policies were great for gays and lesbians in general, I never felt any safer or more secure as a result of their implementation. I also experienced the wave of coming out and increased visibility for gays and lesbians nationally, and was able to see more visibility even in the workplace, as more people were out than ever before, especially in the past few years. Something was definitely happening, changing even, right before my eyes and it was extraordinarily exciting to be a part of it all. This is yet another reason why studying gays in the workplace is so appealing and important.
Research standpoint and research questions

My personal experience in the workplace provides the standpoint from which I begin my research. My own thinking on this is reminiscent of Dorothy Smith's case for the standpoint of women in sociology, when she said:

The standpoint of women situates the sociological subject prior to the entry into the abstracted conceptual mode, vested in texts, this is the order of the relations of ruling. From this standpoint, we know the everyday world through the particularities of our local practices and activities, in the actual places of our work and the actual time it takes. In making the everyday world problematic we also problematize the everyday localized practices of the objectified forms of knowledge organizing our everyday worlds. (Smith 1990, 28)

For this study, I offer the standpoint of an out gay, white, middle-class man in the workplace, and bring my own experiences, practices, activities, and biases as a guide for offering directional intuition to my research. I also posit that this is an important aspect of my research that cannot be understated because of the unique lens from which I operate as a gay white man, and from which my participants live out their daily lives as gay white men.

Patricia Hill Collins argued that Black women possess a “self-defined standpoint on their own oppression” and that two interlocking components characterize this standpoint.

First, Black women’s political and economic status provides them with a distinctive set of experiences that offer a different view of material reality than that available to other groups. Second, these experiences stimulate a distinctive Black feminist consciousness concerning that material reality. A subordinate group not only experiences a different reality than a group that rules, but a subordinate group may interpret that reality differently than a dominant group. (Collins 1989, 746)

This can be said of gay white men as well, who bring their own distinct set of experiences, realities, and interpretations to the table. These distinctions are important, and through this project, I hope to bring them—through the standpoint of gay white men—further into the forefront of sociological debate. It is particularly important because as a minority group in
America, gay white men offer a unique perspective tied to the reality that based on race and
gender they are privileged, but based on sexual orientation are an oppressed group, presenting
a situation of potential status inconsistency. Adding to the unique status of gay white men is
the reality that sexual orientation has the capacity to remain invisible and gay men face many
choices about whether or not to divulge their orientation. The intersection of their race,
gender, and sexual orientation create unique circumstances for gay white men that beg to be
studied and analyzed.

When I began thinking about how I might study gay white men in the workplace,
there were many options of what could be researched, because so little had been done to date.
I settled on wanting to combine my own research with what we have already established
within the sociology discipline relative to gender and race within the workplace. It is well
documented that women have faced challenges in the workplace, most obviously the glass
ceiling effect identified in the 1970s. Rosabeth Moss Kanter argued that “structures of
opportunity (mobility prospects) and power (influence upward), along with the proportional
representation of a person’s social type, define and shape the ways that organization members
respond to their jobs and to each other” (Kanter 1976, 415). Women, she found, were
disadvantaged in these areas. Kanter (1977) also introduced the important idea of
homosocial reproduction, whereby she claims that men in positions of power are more likely
to hire (or mentor) other men who are more like them, thus allowing them to climb the
corporate ladder more effectively. However, her work defined men very broadly and did not
take into account men of different sexual orientations, which leads to more questions than
answers. If we added gay men to this analysis, would the findings be any different? Or, do
gay men face similar challenges relative to homosocial reproduction with heterosexual men and/or a denial of access to power and opportunity structures? By researching the work lives of gay white men, we might come closer to finding these answers and determining if, in fact, it is appropriate to lump all white men into one category for the sake of analysis.

Additionally, studies have shown that people of color face significant challenges in the workplace, including being stereotyped into specific jobs, which are almost always lower paying jobs. For example, Tomaskovic-Devey (1993) found evidence of job segregation and job status closure by race (and gender), but did not explore sexual orientation in his analysis.

The reality that individuals hold multiple identities based on race, gender, and class has often been discussed in feminist literature. West and Fenstermaker point out that “in any given situation (whether or not that situation can be characterized as face-to-face interaction or as the more ‘macro’ workings of institutions), the simultaneous accomplishments of class, gender, and race will differ in context and outcome” (West and Fenstermaker 1995, 30).

What about sexual orientation? In looking at Asian American sexualities, Takagi (1996) points out that race is evident and sexual orientation may be visible or invisible. She states, “As Asian Americans, we do not think in advance about whether or not to present ourselves as ‘Asian American,’ rather, that is an identification that is worn by us, whether we like it or not” (Takagi 1996, 25). She also argues that race and sexual orientation, for many, are experienced as separate places—emotionally, physically and intellectually. Ward argues that while feminist intersectional theory is an important theoretical position “the dictate in feminist intersectional theory to not count oppressions is difficult to reconcile with the experience of many lesbians of color that ‘not all differences are created equal’ inside social
movement organizations" (Ward 2004, 82). The reality of differences based on race, gender, class, and sexual orientation and their interlocking impacts is an important distinction. Recent arguments that ranking oppressions is valid because not all differences are created equal become particularly salient when discussing sexual orientation, which can be kept hidden. Additionally, the position that oppressions become more or less salient or prevalent based on the situation in which one finds his or herself is another important distinction.

When considering gay white men in this argument, a complex situation arises, one where race and gender denote positions of power and privilege, but the invisible factor, sexual orientation, a position of potential oppression. This will be explored further in Chapter 2.

How could I take what we already know about inequality in the workplace and adapt it (or expand it) to the unique situation of gay white men described above? Literally dozens of options were available to me. I could study the different industries in which gay men work. I could test or dispel the stereotypes often attributed to gay men and the types of jobs they hold (hairdressers and florists, among the more popular stereotypes). I could look at salaries of gay white men relative to straight men and women. I could review specific cases of workplace discrimination or study if some industries are more homophobic than others. I could look at the different work experiences of blue collar and white collar gay men. These are all highly valid and important research topics and areas. I hope my own research inspires others to continue to research gay men and lesbians in the workplace, including some of the areas just mentioned.

In the end, I decided to look specifically at how gay white men navigate the workplace in their day-to-day lives. While this is a very broad starting point, I started my
research with very little to go on relative to historical research (other than Woods’ research) and I did not know quite what to expect once I began the research. For instance, would I find that being out in the workplace hinders one’s professional growth or increases the likeliness of facing discrimination? Would closeted men fare better than out men relative to advancement and professional opportunity? Had anything changed, despite increased visibility and friendly workplace policies, since Woods’ findings in the early 1990s? Though I did not know what to expect, I did know that I wanted to learn more about how gay men navigate the workplace and determine if they do, in fact, face workplace discrimination, experience glass-ceiling-like effects in their careers, or does their male privilege prevail (regardless of sexual orientation)?

Despite stereotypes, gay men are a diverse subgroup of the American population. Gay men are of all ages, races, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, careers, geographical regions, and faiths. Studying all types of gay men in the workplace seemed unreasonable if not impossible. Knowing that recent research by Badgett (2001) has indicated a growing interest in gay men and lesbians as a niche market, coupled with Reaburn’s (2004) evidence of workplace activism which has led to more gay-friendly policies in the corporate environment, there appears to be greater movement or activity in the corporate sector relative to gay and lesbian issues. This made the corporate sector an intriguing and important area to begin the type of research I set out to conduct. It is also well documented that men of color face different obstacles in the workplace than white men, and while studying gay men of color is important, I was most compelled in my own work to look at gay white men in corporate America primarily because of the unique position their race, gender, and sexual
orientation presents. Additionally, I chose to narrow my sample to gay white men primarily because the workplace literature so often bundles this group into the dominant category of white men, and my own concern with historical studies is the presumption that it was adequate to combine all white men without differentiation based on sexual orientation. It is well established that white men hold power in American culture in general, and very specifically maintain and control corporate power structures. Barbara Reskin states that "men make rules that preserve their privileges. With respect to earnings, the current rule—that one's job or occupation determines one's pay—has maintained white men's economic advantage because men and women are differently distributed across jobs" (Reskin 1988, 72).

Just how do gay white men fit within this power structure and is it adequate to include them in this larger group commonly defined as "white men"? If white male power is "part of the problem" relative to social inequality (in the workplace and beyond), then are gay white men "part of the problem"? Again, it is the presumed position of power and privilege ascribed to white men that makes studying a subgroup—gay white men—intriguing and important.

Studying how gay white men navigate the workplace begins to address many of the questions posed above, and should lead to a better understanding of distinctions (or commonalities) among white men, encourage us to further segment the category "white men" in future research, and acknowledge the unique position of gay white men. Fee (2000), Kaufman (1994), and Kimmel (1994), among others, have already demonstrated the dangers of categorizing all white men together, and each has marked dramatic distinctions between heterosexual and homosexual men. I would hope my research adds, builds upon, or challenges the concepts and theories put forth by these and other researchers who have
focused much of their work on studying men and masculinities and who have been willing to
distinguish between gay and straight men. My own distinction between gay and straight
white men within the context of the workplace should enrich not only the men and
masculinities literature, but also the workplace literature within the social science disciplines.

I chose to look at men in white collar positions for several reasons. First and
foremost, as mentioned earlier, research has been conducted on the corporate environment
and attitudes towards gays. The HRC has looked in depth at the policies of major U.S.
corporations and has indicated a trend toward more favorable workplace conditions for gay
men and lesbians, and Raeburn (2004) has offered an explanation of how these policies came
into existence. However, no one has explored how corporate changes impact the individual
worker at the micro-level. To study men in the corporate environment allows us to determine
the effectiveness or importance of more gay-friendly corporate policies and environments on
the individual. I, however, have no doubt that the work lives of gay white collar workers
dramatically differ from those of gay blue collar workers, but my own research did not look
at these distinctions.

I also chose to look at out gay men, in part, because their experiences are
understudied—despite the fact that more people are out today than ever before—and because
their experiences offer a contrast to closeted gay men. In addition, being out and making
sexual orientation visible may open the door for discrimination or a dimension of inequality
and oppression that, hypothetically, can be avoided by white men who are heterosexual or
closeted. However, this creates a major challenge. How does one determine if someone is
out or not? In fact, how does one define being out? Are there degrees or dimensions of
being out? Odds are if you asked ten gay men or lesbians how they would define being out you would get ten different definitions. Conversely, how does one define being closeted? The “closet” as a concept within gay communities has multiple meanings and possibilities. One might be closeted to one’s family members but out to friends, or closeted at work but out to one’s family. The complexity of outness is apparent and must be addressed before one can effectively study out gay men. In response, I have developed a model of “doing outness,” which is presented in Chapters 2 and 3.

Starting the study: Sample definition and methods

I set out in May, 2002, to study out gay white men in corporate America. How did I select my seventeen person sample? Gay men and lesbians are not especially easy to find or readily identifiable, primarily because of the invisibility of sexual orientation. Various methods have been used historically to gain access to gay communities. I considered many possible avenues to find gay men that would fit my study profile. For example, Woods (1993) used liaisons—people, often friends, he knew who were gay—to network and identify men who would participate in his study. In the end, wanting as diverse a group as possible, especially beyond my own circle of gay friends, I decided to send a “call for interviewees” request to various gay list serves. While gay list serves might attract a predominantly web-savvy audience, I assumed many white-collar professionals still in the workforce possessed at least some web experience. I used the assistance of the LGBT office at Iowa State University in identifying some list serves as well as local and regional gay men’s professional network clubs and organizations. These groups helped me gain access to various list serves.
Knowing that gay men are often reluctant to respond to such requests for interviews, I felt that using an anonymous means (I do not know them and they do not know me in the context of a list serve posting), but familiar venue (a list serve to which they already belonged) might produce a greater willingness to respond.

In addition, and quite deliberately, I indicated in my message that I myself was an out gay man conducting this study, based on the knowledge that often gay men might be reluctant to talk with people outside the gay communities about gay issues. The response was overwhelming. I received dozens of emails indicating not only willingness to participate, but actual desire to be a part of what many responded as being an important study of our communities. Rather than having a crisis of identifying out gay men, I had the problem of being overwhelmed with where to start. However, wanting to interview out gay white men who had several years of professional experience in the white-collar workplace, purposive sampling was required for this study. Therefore, some respondents did not in fact meet the requirements. Many worked outside of the corporate environment. Others were in the workforce for such a short time, I would not be able to actually determine if they were being denied promotions, for example, or other nuances of the workplace that would effectively allow me to draw sound conclusions. I set a minimum of five years of professional experience as the cut-off point for interviewing respondents.

Early in the process I determined that focusing the research in the Midwest was practical because of their proximity to me and ability to connect face-to-face with most of the respondents, coupled with the reality that I still had a full-time job to which I had obligations and getting out of town would not necessarily be easy. The majority of respondents resided
in the Midwest or had had some professional work experience in the Midwest during their career. This does pose potential limitations to the study findings, since cultural differences exist throughout the United States, and this sample represents primarily a Midwest culture. Along the way some respondents did back out once they learned of the time commitment expected for the interviews. Nonetheless, the sheer number of people wanting to be a part of the study—over 75 who actually responded to my posting—was very satisfying considering I started the project fearful of finding enough participants.

In this case, the use of list serves proved to be a tremendously successful technique to reach this often invisible population. It struck a balance of familiarity, in that they were existing members of the list serve, and trust, partly related to the fact the message was broadcasted to a list they trusted. However, the fact that I disclosed my own sexual orientation up front was most important. Once I actually met with respondents, they often disclosed that the fact I was “one of them” made them more willing to participate. Many expressed gratitude that I was doing this research. Rich, a financial planner, stated at the end of the interview, “You asked a lot of really good questions. I found myself getting energized about half-way through, starting to pick up momentum and enjoyed the opportunity to share some of my life experiences.” Most asked at the end of the interviews for insider information of what I was finding in my research. The level of comfort initially and throughout the process must be noted. There was an assumption of safety and openness that went along with the fact that two gay, white men were getting together to talk about life experiences in their white collar jobs. In many ways, as a gay white man, I was likely granted access that others might not have been granted, a benefit of researching someone within my own community.
Throughout the conversations, respondents used gay slang with the presumption that I would understand what they meant, and often they would make inferences that indicated they assumed I knew what they were talking about because of some commonly shared bond or experience among gay men. Often “insider” language was used, that to the outside world might have sounded like utter nonsense (a topic to be explored in greater detail later in this manuscript).

While this bonding interaction and sense of community occurred during many of these interviews, I must mention that there are some potential drawbacks to the phenomenon. During many of the conversations respondents would ask about my own personal experiences both in the workplace and beyond. Being cooperative and comfortable myself, I often shared my own experiences openly. Such behavior, according to Fowler (1993), runs the risk of moving us beyond objective researcher and respondent. He states that “behaviors that communicate the personal, idiosyncratic characteristics of the interviewer are to be avoided because they will vary across interviews. To behave as a professional, not a friend, helps to standardize the relationship across the interviewer and respondents” (Fowler 1993, 108). Through casual conversations we would often learn that we knew some of the same people in the gay communities or within their companies, which in turn may have made the respondents occasionally reluctant to fully disclose their experiences. While I cannot specifically point to an instance, there is the potential that some individuals might have answered how they felt I wanted them to answer the questions in an effort to please the interviewer, given our comfort levels with one another. As Hochschild points out, “People pose even in their confessions” (Hochschild, 1983, 57). Additionally, I relied on the
respondents’ recollections of their workplace experiences. As Woods discovered in his own research, “it would be inaccurate to say that we collected data on the ways gay men actually behave at work. Our data reflect, rather, what gay men recall and choose to reveal about their own behaviors at work” (Woods 1993, 263). In many cases the recollections of the participants were not at one moment in recent time, but in some cases spanned the last twenty years of work experience, further challenging the accuracy of the information provided. However, at the same time, most of the data I was interested in collecting was focused on the past five to ten years of their professional careers, mostly in an attempt to control for the ever-changing climate for and attitudes toward gays and lesbians.

Once I began interviews I also employed the snowball technique by asking each respondent if they would recommend other gay men to be a part of the project, due in part to my not wanting to solely rely on the list serve for my sample. In nearly all cases, respondents readily (sometimes eagerly) gave me additional names of men to contact for the study. They were quite comfortable giving me such information as a friend or colleague’s phone number or email address. However, I always asked respondents to contact their friend to get permission before I would follow up with these individuals after I heard back from them in an effort to respect their anonymity. Respondents would call or email their friends to tell them about the study and then have them contact me to be interviewed. Many followed up with a call or email to me, and several ended up taking part in the research project. Therefore the snowball technique was effectively used to identify a portion of the study participants.

Participants were initially contacted via email or phone and personal interview times were established. All but two of the interviews were conducted face-to-face in various
locations, including my home, the participants’ homes, restaurants, public libraries and coffee shops. The willingness of participants to invite me, a stranger, into their homes often surprised me but spoke to the idea that being a self-identified gay man was enough for them to trust me, despite having not met me. Two interviews were conducted by phone, at the request of the respondents. The phone interviews were done due to logistical challenges rather than out of reluctance on the part of the interviewee to meet face-to-face. Three interviewees turned out to be individuals who, in fact, were not out at work but rather closeted. I made the choice during those interviews to continue my dialogue with them, albeit with a completely different line of questions. Their responses are referenced in Chapter 3, mainly because of the stark differences that were evident in their workplace experiences compared to all other respondents. Each interview lasted from forty-five minutes to two hours. While a list of specific questions were asked in all interviews, the process was intentionally kept rather open, using a semi-standardized interview schedule, in order to gather the maximum amount of information about their personal experiences. In a few instances, follow up emails or calls were conducted with some participants to gather additional information or clarify points they made during the interviews. A total of seventeen interviews were completed, transcribed and analyzed for this research.

The men I interviewed worked in many white collar settings, including information technology, insurance, publishing, telecommunications, real estate, management, banking, agri-business, retail, energy, medical services, and financial planning. Educational backgrounds of the participants also varied, including one individual with a high school diploma, one with an associate’s degree, eleven with bachelor’s degrees, four with master’s
degrees, and one holding a Ph.D. The sample represented various age groups and generations as well, with ages ranging from 30 to 60. Five respondents were between the ages of 30-39, nine between 40-49, two between 50-59, and one age 60. All were currently active in the workforce. For more information about each respondent, please see the appendix.

Manuscript layout: What is to come?

In order to further conceptualize and analyze how out gay white men navigate the workplace; I developed an interview schedule that explored subject matter in areas that I define as moments of engagement. Connell used this term to describe “an active appropriation of what was offered, a purposeful construction of a way of being in the world.” He defined this appropriation “as the moment of engagement with hegemonic masculinity, the moment in which the boy takes up the project of hegemonic masculinity” (Connell 1995, 152). My own use of this term is a variation of Connell’s usage. For me it simply means those moments in the everyday workplace where out gay white men encounter specific navigation points and make decisions—some conscious and some unconscious—about how to proceed in an effort to be successful in their work lives. How gay men respond to these moments of engagement is critical in understanding how they navigate the workplace. Moments of engagement, in this context, are also key ingredients in the doing outness model I have developed in Chapters 2 and 3.

In order to navigate an active work environment, inevitably gay men will encounter sexuality—both heterosexuality and homosexuality. The way in which each of these encounters—or moments of engagement—is handled or executed plays a key role in
determining how and if gay white men can successfully survive and thrive in the workplace. I have devoted Chapter 4 in this manuscript to further explore how gay white men navigate their interactions with other gay people (homosexuality) in the workplace as well as their own self-perceptions of their sexuality. Engaging “gayness” has a direct impact on how gay men make their way in the workplace and on how they do outness. Additionally, gay men will inevitably interact with heterosexual women and men in the workplace. There will come times when they intersect with heterosexuality, and the way in which they engage heterosexuals in the workplace will clearly impact their navigation successes or failures. This is addressed in Chapter 5. Finally, I will explore how gay men engage masculinity, or more specifically hegemonic masculinity, in the workplace, also addressed in Chapter 5. The exploration of these moments of engagement to better understand how out gay white men navigate the workplace is directly tied to doing outness, which, as stated, will be explored further in Chapters 2 and 3.

As mentioned often, my ultimate goal is to advance a greater understanding of how out gay white men navigate the workplace. This is an important contribution to how we look at inequality structures in the workplace, especially since white men continue to hold organizational workplace power. Looking at out gay white men as a separate group is a critical distinction, and we stand to gain a more thorough understanding of workplace inequality structures as a result. Additionally, this more thorough understanding should benefit gay men at large in understanding the workplace cultures in which they work and spend many hours of their lives. I suspect some will read this manuscript and relate to the stories shared by other out gay men, while some might read this and point to stark contrasts
between their work lives and those of the men in this study. I would also hope this manuscript inspires other gay men; those not yet ready to come out, to realize that there is life beyond the closet, even in the workplace, and there are potentially some advantages to being out at work. This manuscript should add to the existing body of literature that examines gender, masculinity, and workplace inequality, and remind researchers that sexual orientation is an essential component of analysis and its invisibility must cease. Finally, while the study is focused on the individual lives of gay white men and how they navigate the workplace, many conclusions can be drawn and generalizations made that could have future policy implications.
CHAPTER 2: DEVELOPING A MODEL OF "DOING OUTNESS"

Before making an effort to fully determine how out white gay men navigate the workplace the term *out* itself must be better defined. This chapter focuses on first defining *outness* through the development of a model for doing outness, and then sharing a context for analyzing how doing outness impacts the lives of gay white men within the workplace. To do so, I will introduce the important key concepts of *institutional outness, degree of outness,* and *dimensions of outness* and explain how they interact with *identities* within the context of specific situations or *moments of engagement,* to better understand and explain how gay men do outness. The model of doing outness emerged from this study of gay white men in the workplace and will be demonstrated through the analysis of how gay men navigate their workplaces in Chapter 3.

*Defining outness*

Terminology ascribed to the gay and lesbian communities, typically developed by gays and lesbians themselves, is often confusing, vague, and can carry multiple meanings. Take for instance the term *closeted.* To gay activists a closeted individual might be anyone who is not as vocal or visible as they are within the gay communities and greater society. To individuals who are just coming to terms with their sexual orientation, being closeted might mean that they are not totally comfortable with their sexual orientation, let alone in a position to share this information with anyone else. To others, being closeted might imply that within some aspects of an individual's life they have not disclosed their sexual orientation. For example, they might be closeted to their family members, but open about their sexual
orientation to their friends. In these examples, the term closeted can be a very personal feeling in the case of individuals just learning about their sexual orientation, or a term ascribed to an entire group of people who are not open about their sexual orientation in all aspects of life, or simply something in between. Therefore being closeted is a fluid and negotiated concept, as is being out.

Is being closeted a psychological state and/or a description of a way a sector of society orchestrates their daily lives?

Woods (1993) argues that the closet has been a principled metaphor by which gay men have thought and spoken about sexual identity. To be in the closet is to misrepresent one's sexuality to others, to encourage or at least permit them to draw a conclusion that one knows is false. A quarter century after the Stonewall riots, conversations about self-disclosure remain shackled to this binary metaphor, one that severely limits our understanding of what is at stake. (Woods 1993, 26)

Woods' point that the either/or scenario of being closeted as inadequate is an important distinction. Woods goes on to explain is it not appropriate to assume two end points—being in the closet versus coming out of the closet. The journey to no longer being closeted—to coming out—takes on many forms and is conducted in various ways with stops and starts, and at different paces for everyone. Additionally, because sexual orientation is invisible and easy to hide or distort (which is why the "closet" can exist in the first place), individuals can make a conscious choice at one time to be closeted and at another to be open about their sexual orientation, with the distinction that once they are open about their sexual orientation, there is virtually no opportunity to turn back and again be closeted in that particular situation or with that audience. However, because our lives can be so segmented it is easy to be closeted in certain environments while being out of the closet in others. Many of the men in
Woods' study demonstrated this very fact by being out among friends and within the greater urban gay communities, but closeted at work. This reveals that gay people are in situations where they must determine their own calculated risk for when and where to be closeted versus out. It also points out that being out is not only fluid, but also a conscious, intentional, negotiated and active state of being.

Related to this idea, Woods claims that gay men manage their sexual identities at work. He states that:

By necessity gay men become adept at thinking about self-disclosure and learn sometimes at great cost, that different sexual identities bring different social consequences. They become self-conscious. They learn to control and monitor outward appearances, to distort them when necessary. They learn to dodge. For some the result is a calculating, deliberate way of approaching social encounters. (Woods 1993, 28)

Woods uses this as a reason why gay men often remain closeted at work. However, what happens when you turn this situation upside down and no longer look at the equation as being closeted but rather as being out? Due to increased visibility in the past decade, looking at outness is important because it impacts the ways in which we do research and offers an opportunity to potentially revise our theories and models or develop new ones.

Is being out the direct inverse of being closeted? Again, I agree with Woods that this is not a case of one or the other or of a binary metaphor, but rather simply different choices offered to gays, rooted in the ability to make their sexual orientation invisible or transparent versus known or disclaimed. Though being out and being closeted appear on the surface to be polar opposites, there remains much gray space in between these two extremes, a space where many gays and lesbians find themselves. While gay individuals must first realize and acknowledge their sexual orientation, at least to themselves, before they have these choices
available to them, being out does have one distinction from being closeted. While being in
the closet may offer a certain hiding place, often perceived as a safe haven, being out does not
offer an ability to hide one's sexual orientation any longer, at least within the institutional
circumstances in which someone comes out. In other words, there is no turning back, or
ability to again hide one's sexual orientation, once disclosure occurs, thus significantly
raising the stakes on being out. Regardless, whether closeted or out, we can no longer view
these two descriptions, or states of being, as binary opposites and must move toward a better
understanding of all the gray space and complexities in between these concepts.

**Toward a model of doing outness**

West and Zimmerman (1987) developed the theoretical framework of “doing gender”
to advance a new understanding of gender as a routine accomplishment embedded in
everyday interactions. It is from this framework that I argue gay men negotiate a similar
course of actions in their everyday lives relative to their sexual orientation and the disclosure
of their orientation. To borrow directly from West and Zimmerman (1987), I argue that
doing outness is undertaken by gay men whose competence as members of society is closely
tied to their sexual orientation. Doing outness involves a complexity of socially guided
perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits of gay and
straight natures. As mentioned in Chapter 1, social movement politics have increased
visibility of gays and lesbians, and this coupled with public perceptions make the day-to-day
interaction between gay men and lesbians and the dominant culture play a significant role in
how gays are defined by society, much of which is driven and perhaps controlled by how they
do outness. Much like West and Zimmerman argue about gender, I also view outness as an “emergent feature of social situations: both as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements and as a means for legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society” (West and Zimmerman 1987, 126).

The distinction between gender and outness is that sex—male versus female (not to be confused with gender)—is typically more apparent than sexual orientation, which can easily be hidden and invisible. Regardless of this distinction, gay men still find themselves doing outness much like men and women do gender in our everyday lives. I would argue that this ability to render sexual orientation invisible is, however, a significant divergence from West and Zimmerman’s theory of doing gender. They argue that “if we do gender appropriately, we simultaneously sustain, reproduce, and render legitimate the institutional arrangements that are based on sex category. If we fail to do gender appropriately, we as individuals—not the institutional arrangements—may be called to account” (West and Zimmerman 1987, 144). While this may be partially true for doing outness, for gay men, doing outness is also different, because there is a conscious choice to being out that typically is only utilized after much deliberation and contemplation, and typically after one has assessed a situation thoroughly. This implies that the embeddedness of gender, which occurs at the point someone is identified as male or female, may be even stronger than that of sexual orientation. Due to its invisibility, sexual orientation as negotiated through doing outness provides gays with a unique ability to contribute to the shaping of what it means to be gay in our society, which will be further demonstrated through the model of doing outness. Because of this unique attribute, it is best to look at being out as a continuum—or process—which has
various levels, layers, and dimensions. This begins the building blocks for a theoretical model of doing outness.

To develop this model, I need to introduce three key concepts—*institutional outness*, *degree of outness*, and *dimensional outness*, and couple these with the already developed concepts of *identities* and *moments of engagements*. The following sections will aim at defining these key terms in the context of doing outness.

**Institutional outness**

Institutional outness should be viewed as a macro level of being out, in other words, within various social institutions such as the family or the workplace. Because of how we compartmentalize and segment our lives, we can be out in certain social circumstances or within certain social institutions, such as the family, social networks, or workplace, while choosing to be closeted in others aspects or institutions of our lives. Some might call this a survival tactic for gays, to only come out in circumstances where they feel safe and comfortable. Institutional outness offers gay men the comfort (or protection) of disclosing only after they have assessed a particular circumstance and made the determination that it is in their best interest, or at least safe, to disclose their sexual orientation. This too makes gays unique from other under-represented groups that are often identified by physical markers, which are, for the most part, not easily hidden.

Gay men often compartmentalize their lives and decisions about divulging their sexual orientation at the institutional level. For example, it may be very frightening for gay men to share their sexual orientation with any part of their family or with anyone at their
workplace, but very easy to divulge their orientation among groups of friends or other social networks. Viewing their lives at these macro levels often gives gay men the flexibility to segment their decision making process—even their lives—at the institutional level.

Institutional outness, when viewed as a choice or decision point to be out within certain groups or institutions, does not necessarily have to imply that this is only a survival tactic for gays, but could also imply that it is actually a strategic, self-serving decision making process which individuals go through (which we will return to later). Once you understand the ability to compartmentalize one’s life, institutional outness can be better understood as a macro-level approach to living one’s life—to choose to be out within compartments of our lives and perhaps closeted in others.

**Dimensions and degrees of outness**

I would argue that within complex social organizations and institutions such as family and workplaces where people can practice institutional outness, there also exists what I term *degrees of outness* and *dimensions of outness*. Once someone has decided to at least share their sexual orientation within a particular institution, the degrees and dimensions of outness further segment these larger complex organizations where institutional outness can occur by looking at smaller subsets of each organization. Therefore, the degrees and dimensions of outness occur at a more micro level and often along a continuum over time. For example, a gay man might be out to only portions of his family, perhaps his parents, but not his extended family. This speaks to the degree to which he is out within the larger institution of family. The same can be said of the workplace where a gay man might be out to his co-workers but
not his supervisor. Or, he might be out to his supervisors but not his subordinates. The degree to which he is out within the workplace is potentially variable along a continuum from closeted (not out to anyone) to full disclosure (everyone knows of his sexual orientation). However, time must be factored into degrees of outness, because over time, individuals may choose to come out to a greater number of people within a particular institution. Within the context of family, a gay man might come out to his parents, denoting a particular degree of outness at that moment in time, but months later come out to his grandparents, thus demonstrating a new and different degree of outness within his family. This further demonstrates that degrees of outness cannot be static, but rather are constantly changing and evolving over time, with the ultimate end being full-disclosure or complete outness within an institution.

What about someone who is closeted, or not out to anyone, within a particular social institution? I believe doing outness, in general, and degrees of outness specifically begin with self-acknowledgment of one’s sexual orientation. If individuals are keenly aware they are gay, but have not yet shared this information with anyone else, they are still out, albeit only to themselves. This would be represented as an extreme (low) degree of outness on a continuum. How far can one take their degrees of outness? To be out in every circumstance to every possible individual would denote complete outness or full disclosure. If being closeted is one extreme of an outness continuum, then full disclosure is the other. It is best to think of degree of outness as the number of people within an institution to which someone has come out over time.
Dimensions of outness are the ways or manner in which individuals choose to come out to others within a social institution. Some may choose to come out in a very humble manner, while others in a very visible, even angry manner. The dimensions of one's outness is still a conscious decision, tied closely to the situation and circumstances one might find themselves involved in leading up to and at the moment of disclosure. To demonstrate dimensions of outness on a continuum, the one extreme would be remaining closeted, choosing not to come out, and the other could be denoted by activism, a decision to come out in a manner that demonstrates one's willingness or commitment to actively pursuing advancements for gays despite any potential consequences. Several other options are available along the continuum, and demonstrate key dimensions of outness, including assimilation and accommodation.

Assimilation indicates that an individual presents his/her orientation in a manner that ensures he/she still fits in with the individual or group to which he/she is coming out. Gordon (1961) looked at assimilation as two-fold, behavioral assimilation and structural assimilation, when looking at ethnic immigrant groups and how they fit into the dominant American culture. He distinguished behavioral assimilation as “the absorption of the cultural behavior patterns of the host society” to structural assimilation as “the entrance of the immigrants and their descendants into the social cliques, organizations, institutional activities, and general civic life of the receiving society” (Gordon 1961, 280). In my model of doing outness and on the continuum of dimensions of outness, I am using assimilation to describe the choice of behaviors of gay men at the point of coming out (which parallels the point of introducing themselves as someone different than what may have otherwise been
assumed). If the goal is assimilation, these behaviors demonstrate little difference from the
dominant culture—to fit in as they likely did prior to coming out. The unique distinction
with sexual orientation is the ability for gay men to operate within social cliques and
organizations—unknown as being gay (displaying a closeted degree of outness)—prior to
coming out, thus allowing them to learn the cultural codes of these situations. Using what
they have learned can facilitate successful assimilation after coming out, if that is their
chosen way to present their dimensions of outness within the context of a particular situation.
Demonstrating difference is the decision to take a non-assimilation approach to one’s
dimensions of outness within a particular social context or situation, and instead pointing out
or accentuating a difference(s) based on sexual orientation.

Accommodation on the other hand denotes a conscious choice of how we can best
attain our goals relative to cultural expectations. Rose Weitz (2004) in her study of women
in the workplace, found examples of accommodation for women in the hairstyles they chose
to wear in their everyday lives.

In our decisions about hair, we actively and rationally make choices based on a
realistic assessment of how we can best obtain our goals, given cultural expectations
regarding female appearance and given our personal resources. As this suggests girls
and women are far from free agents. If we ignore cultural expectations for female
appearance we pay a price in lost wages, diminished marital prospects, lowered status
and so on. If we attempt to follow cultural expectations, we pay a price in time,
money, and energy when we obsess about our hair. (Weitz 2004, 222)

Therefore in the case of dimensions of outness, accommodation is a choice of demonstrating,
upon coming out, the ability to live up to cultural expectations. The question remains, are the
cultural expectations that of a gay man or lesbian or maintenance of the cultural codes in play
before coming out? This will be discussed at greater length later.
Dimensions of outness occur at the situational level, tied directly to coming out within a given circumstance or situation to an individual or group of individuals. Individuals can demonstrate different dimensions in different social contexts depending on to whom they are coming out. Much like institutional outness, dimensions of outness do not necessarily have to imply that this is only a survival tactic for gays and lesbians, but could also imply that it is actually a strategic, self-serving decision-making process that individuals go through. As one can see, the interplay between institutional outness and dimensions of outness, coupled with the complexities of dimensions of outness itself, conceptually make studying out gay men particularly challenging.

The interconnectedness of outness and identities

While dimensions of outness (the way in which someone comes out) is a key factor in how gay men do outness, it is not the only factor important to this complex process. One’s dimensions of outness, while often contemplated and chosen, is a decision that occurs at the time of disclosing one’s sexual orientation. In other words, coming out is a state of being attached to acknowledging or divulging one’s sexual orientation to others at a particular moment in time. This is typically a critical point, and how the sharing of one’s orientation is delivered likely plays a significant role in how others will react. However, because it is a process, doing outness does not begin or cease at the point of disclosure of one’s sexual orientation (though it does mark a point whereby someone can no longer deny their orientation), but rather much of doing outness occurs both before and after dimension of outness is determined. In this regard, dimensions of outness and how they are played out
relative to specific situations are but one small part of how gay men do outness. To fully understand doing outness one must pay close attention to what happens before and after sexual orientation is divulged.

Of equal importance to how gay men do outness is tied to their identity, or more appropriately identities. If the decision to come out is one starting point, then what happens before and after tells other parts of the story. To publicly identify oneself as a gay man—the taking on of a gay identity (or identities) — has very specific ramifications within the context of one’s life. Since so many opinions and reactions exist to sexual orientation, in this case, homosexuality, gay individuals can only guess how those around them might react to the revelation. However, tied to dimensions of outness, gay men are making conscious decisions based on how they perceive others might react to the fact they are gay and choosing a specific way in which to divulge their orientation. Following this act, gay men have to make additional decisions about how they will present or define themselves to their co-workers, subordinates, supervisors, family members, friends or whoever it is to whom they came out. This presentation or definition, like it or not, will be tied to their self-identification as a gay man. Additionally, many of their actions before divulging their sexual orientation will retrospectively be tied to their newly announced gay male identity by those around them.

To speak of a “gay identity” however is misleading. Identity is not monolithic, but rather quite complex. As Seidman argues:

Identities refer to the way we think of ourselves and the self image we publicly project. No doubt our identities are related to how we feel about ourselves and to our character or personality; as such, the image we publicly fashion might feel like a spontaneous expression of who we really are. Yet we can project an identity only through acting purposefully. The decisions we make about the way we dress, walk, and talk, the language we use and how we use it, who we associate with, and where
and with whom we live make a statement about our gender, sexuality, social class and countless other markers of identity. In other words, we fashion identities by drawing on a culture that already associates identities with certain behaviors, places and things. Identities are complex. We don't have just one and in the course of our lives we can alter—add or subtract—identities. (Seidman 2002, 9)

Because everyone displays or possesses multiple identities, gay men do not display one unified gay identity, but rather define and demonstrate multiple identities that may (or may not) be tied to defining their gay identity. Seidman (2002) posits that we all have both core and secondary identities. Therefore, an individual might strongly identify his core identity as that of a being gay, but may display other identities, such as that of man, father, brother, or drag queen as well (albeit secondary). Additionally, before coming out (and sometimes even after coming out) most men displayed “straight identities.”

While society at large might have a concept(s), rooted in stereotypes, of what a gay identity might look like, gay men, when utilizing dimensions of outness, can define, re-define, or challenge society’s stereotypical definition of gay men. The choice of how someone comes out, defining his dimensions of outness, has the capacity to change the dominant culture’s (or subsets of the dominant culture) views of what it means to be gay in society. As mentioned earlier, this is a point of divergence from doing gender. By coming out at strategic times to different people, gay men can at least partially control the image assigned to them by their co-workers, subordinates, supervisors, friends or family members because a prescribed image or identity already exists in the minds of these people before learning about the gay men’s sexual orientation. By defining, displaying, and, in essence, controlling, the identities portrayed to others before coming out, gay men have an opportunity to shape the pre-conceived notions about themselves, which in turn can soften the blow, so to
speak, of the revelation of their sexual orientation to others. Even after coming out, gay men can call upon various identities to further define themselves. This may also be a powerful tool to challenging others to re-examine their conception of gay men and has the potential to change attitudes.

It should be noted that this reality places gay white men in a unique social context unlike any other—at once belonging to the dominant group (white men) and a subordinate group (gay) depending on dimensions of outness. The societal reactions to gay men, however, can potentially be controlled or influenced by dimensions of outness coupled with the use of multiple identities which are unique to them as a social group, and unlike any other minority or under-represented group in society. Gay white men, to a certain degree, can move in and out of these two contexts—memberships in the dominant and a subordinate social group (which will be discussed at greater length later in this manuscript). The important point remains that individuals call upon multiple scripts or identities in their everyday lives, and this practice plays a significant role in how gay men position themselves both before and after coming out to others. The interplay between these identities and dimensions of outness (how one presents their sexual orientation) are essential in understanding how gay men do outness.

However, we must remember identities are directed by everyday interactions. Identities are not fixed, but rather fluid and change based on social context. Calhoun (1994) speaks of narrative identity, when he states:

The approach builds from the premise that narrativity and relationality are conditions of social being, social consciousness, social action, institutions, structures, even society itself—that is, the self and the purposes of self are constructed and reconstructed in the context of internal and external relations of time and place and
power that are constantly in flux. That social identities are constituted through narrativity, social action is guided by narrativity, and social processes and interactions—both institutional and interpersonal—are narratively mediated provides a way of understanding the recursive presence of particular identities that is not universal. (Calhoun 1994, 65)

Calhoun clearly points out that identities change and are determined through the productive tension of internal and external interactions and relations with a social context or specific situations. Additionally, he states that “the narrative identity approach embeds the action within relationships and stories that shift over time and space and thus precludes categorical stability in action” (Calhoun 1994, 65). Butler (1990) tangentially supports this notion in that she believes identity is performative—that there is no separate identity from one’s actual performance within a certain social context rooted in space and time.

Rosenfeld argues an interactionist tradition of identity, whereby identities, while the product of interpretive work, are themselves interpretive resources; actors invoke existing categories of persons—whether they identify with them or not—to make sense of their own and other’s actions, and elaborate those categories as new behaviors, interpretations, or circumstances emerge. Through this situated discursive and practical identity work, categories and attributes “of” a particular identity are invoked, enacted and elaborated by those claiming that identity for self and for individuals and group others. (Rosenfeld 2003, 223)

While a slightly different take on identity than what is posited by Calhoun and others, there is merit in Rosenfeld’s concept of identity “work.” This concept was also used by Stein in studying lesbians to “signify the process by which many individuals sought to make their subjective sense of self congruent with their emergent social identity and to narrow the experiential gap separating them from other, more experienced lesbians” (Stein 1997, 66). In this case, the use of some pre-defined or preconceived notion of a particular identity—which implies the existence of identities that are not determined entirely within social context—is
called upon or performed in certain social situations and contexts. This ties directly back to
the earlier discussion of how certain stereotypical definitions of identity attributed to gay men
can exist in the dominant culture, but Stein demonstrates it exists even within the subgroup
(in her case lesbians).

However, this relates closely to how gay men use their dimensions of outness in
concert with the identities (whether institutional, stereotypical, or performative) they call
upon when operating within certain social institutions. The interaction between the two is
critical to how gay men do outness. As stated, the identities called upon leading up to the
acknowledgement of one’s orientation influence not only how the revelation is received by
others, but often how the revelation itself is delivered. For example, if someone calls upon a
stereotypical gay male identity and uses this identity before or after revealing his orientation,
how his sexual orientation is perceived by others will be impacted by the identities used to
deliver it. Similarly, if someone calls upon more traditional identities, such as being in a
monogamous, committed relationship with children who just happens to be gay, a different
reaction would likely occur. Therefore, the interplay between identity and orientation
revelation—dimensions of outness—impacts behaviors and perceptions. These interactions
are central to developing a theoretical model of doing outness.

Moments of engagement: Doing outness within a social context

It has been established that gay men make decisions about their degree and
dimensions of outness based on a host of reasons and motivations. Gay men may choose to
be out to individuals in the workplace or their families as a result of interactions over time
that indicate it is safe to come out to them. At the same time, particular situations may present themselves as opportunities for gay men or lesbians to divulge their orientation (determine their dimensions of outness). In this regard, both the individuals involved, as well as the particular situations in which gay men find themselves, might influence if, when, and how someone comes out to others. Once gay men are out to certain individuals or within the context of particular situations, the on-going interactions with these individuals, coupled with the situations in which they find themselves throughout their work or family lives, might dictate their further degree and dimensions of outness as well. In other words, being out in certain situations may motivate or inspire (or hinder) one’s willingness to come out to others within the institution. Perhaps someone had a negative experience (or reaction) when coming out, which in turn may discourage him from coming out to others. One cannot look at only the individuals with whom gay men interact, but also the situations in which they find themselves to determine and understand doing outness.

The decisions of when and how to divulge one’s sexual orientation along with the identities one performs both before and after this disclosure, are closely tied to what I termed in Chapter 1 as “moments of engagement.” It is during those day-to-day situations and interactions, at any moment in time with any number of individuals or groups and within the context of place, that gay men must make the decision of how or when to present their sexual orientation, to determine their dimensions of outness and what identities to perform or call upon given the social context in which they find themselves. It is not during quiet moments alone at one’s desk that someone is put into a situation where such decisions must be made. Therefore, doing outness is, in part, tied to moments of engagement. Doing outness is
How does the doing outness model work?

In the most macro sense, outness is fluid, meaning someone can choose to display or hide their sexual orientation at any given moment in time in any particular circumstance. The doing outness model substantiates this, but takes outness one step further by demonstrating how divulging (or concealing) one’s orientation is negotiated. Doing outness typically involves the interplay of three levels or layers mentioned earlier—moments of engagement, identities, and dimensions of outness. The social context or situation—moment of engagement—in which one finds oneself is a key ingredient in determining what identity (or identities) to call upon given that unique situation. Once the identity is selected and portrayed, the individual is able to assess how comfortable the situation is relative to his sexual orientation. The identities called upon for the given situation are based on either previous experiences or interactions with that individual or group, or within the context of the setting. Individuals interacting with someone for the first time will likely call upon those identities, rooted in past experience, that appear to be most appropriate given the situation in which they find themselves.

Once the identities have been matched to and called upon for a particular moment of engagement, a decision may be made at that time whether or not to divulge sexual orientation. However, it may be a series of interactions or moments of engagement that will dictate if and when one’s dimensions of outness is selected and advanced. In other words,
one may interact with a group of people many times before determining if and how one will divulge one’s sexual orientation. At the same time, given a particular moment of engagement, an individual may select a particular identity and then divulge his sexual orientation, thus selecting their dimension of outness at that moment in time (see Figure 1 for illustration). It is also feasible for individuals to immediately divulge their sexual orientation in a particular situation—thus advancing their degree of outness and demonstrating a particular dimension of outness—but later call upon or match certain identities to the situation to ensure that the revelation of sexual orientation is accepted within the context of the situation or with the individual(s) involved in the interaction (see Figure 2 for illustration). In all of these examples, doing outness is reliant on specific moments of engagement in which the individuals select identities to call upon and make a decision whether or not, and how, to present their sexual orientation (dimensions of outness) in an effort to negotiate a specific response to their sexual orientation.

This mediation of identities and dimensions of outness (often a back-and-forth process) with moments of engagement determine how one does outness. To further explain, consider that even in a gay-friendly situation, one might call upon specific identities that do not divulge sexual orientation and demonstrate a closeted dimension of outness. Or, one might be in a gay-hostile situation with another individual yet call upon a gay identity (identities), divulge one’s orientation, and be on the activist end of the dimensions of outness continuum (but also on the low end of the degree of outness continuum because this is the first person with whom the individual has shared his/her sexual orientation). Someone could find oneself in a gay-friendly group of married men (which might be in an unfamiliar
Social Identity Context Called Upon

• Identity X
• Identity Y
• Identity Z

Dimensions of Outness

Figure 1. Moments of engagement where identities are chosen prior to dimension of outness

Dimensions of Outness

Social Context

• Situation A
• Situation B
• Situation C

Identity Called Upon

• Identity X
• Identity Y
• Identity Z

Figure 2. Moments of engagement where dimensions of outness precede chosen identities
situation) and come out instantly, while displaying an identity of faithful partner or loving father, thus falling on a more assimilationist point on the dimensions of outness continuum. Regardless of outcome, each of these examples offers an example of how gay men are doing outness in their everyday lives and the multiple, almost endless, possibilities for doing outness. The next chapter looks more specifically at how this model of doing outness emerged from the study of gay white men.
CHAPTER 3: APPLYING THE MODEL OF “DOING OUTNESS”

How does one apply this model of doing outness to how out gay white men navigate the workplace? For my own study, I purposively selected men demonstrating institutional outness—all men in my study had to at least self-identify as being out—thus displaying some degree of outness greater than being closeted within the social institution of the workplace. Monitoring degree of outness was challenging because degrees are determined over time, and my interviews were conducted at specific moments in time, thus relying on historical accounts of coming out to more people within a workplace. Within my sample, I also looked closely at the varied dimensions of outness of when and how these white gay men came out to others in the workplace. Some of my participants disclosed their sexual orientation to all co-workers and subordinates, others were out to only some co-workers or some subordinates, with varying degrees and dimensions in between. All respondents were out to at least some co-workers. One commonality among all of my participants is that their immediate supervisor was aware of their sexual orientation. In most cases, the supervisors of supervisors, up to and including CEO’s and presidents were also aware of the respondents’ sexual orientation. In wanting to study the upward mobility of gay men in the workplace, I felt it was essential that being out to supervisors (or those making decisions about promotions and mobility) and at least some peers was essential to truly test mobility and workplace navigation in order to distinguish these men from closeted men (like those found in Woods’ study). To these ends, I purposefully selected men who self-identified as being out in the workplace based on a theoretical understanding of outness.
An additional key component of my study group is that none of them self-identified as gay activists within the workplace, which means no one represented in this study consistently falls on the extreme end of the dimensions of outness continuum. This is critical to the overall analysis of this body of research, and will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

**Examples of degrees and dimensions of outness**

In looking at specific examples of how gay men displayed varied degrees and dimensions of outness, I quickly discovered diverse experiences among the participants. For example, Tommy, a 42-year-old human resources director with an agri-business company, indicated that his company recently passed a domestic partnership benefits program and he used this new policy as a way to come out to his boss, the company president. He indicated his boss supported the policy and was actually under the impression that the company already had such a policy. Tommy said:

> He’s a huge supporter of this and so I am telling him that the compensation committee made this change and we were going in this direction and he was going on and on about how great this was and he thought we already had it, so I assumed this was a good time to tell him. I’ll just ride the wave and I said, “By the way, I don’t know if you know this or not but I have a domestic partner,” and he was completely thrilled.

Beyond the fact that Tommy came out to his supervisor, this example also demonstrates how he used a specific situation—in the context of a conversation where his supervisor demonstrated strong support for a particular gay-friendly policy—to come out to his boss. Tommy also indicated the he had come out very early in his tenure with the company to the corporate attorney when they were discussing issues of domestic partners, again realizing this
person was supportive of these policies. In both instances, Tommy’s approach to divulging his orientation placed him more on a “middle-of-the-road” dimension of outness, neither remaining closeted, nor demonstrating activist tendencies.

While considering degree of outness, by coming out to his supervisor and the corporate attorney, Tommy clearly advanced his degree of outness. However, Tommy also shared that he represents all employees of the company as the human resources director, and that he was not as open with all employees. He stated that “I’m a little more cautious with the production facility personnel because they are just a different breed of people. They are a bit less informed, less understanding, and might be more verbally abusive about it, so I’ve not been as forthcoming or open with that group of people.” Despite his perceived position of power over this group of employees, he had not yet disclosed his sexual orientation to anyone in the group, due largely in part to his assumption that the blue-collar employees would be less tolerant of his sexual orientation. Based on his experiences, including specific interactions, Tommy made a decision not to advance his degree of outness beyond being closeted with this group, and has yet to negotiate how (let alone when or if) he will divulge his orientation.

Mark, a 35-year-old working in the retail industry, suggested that he was very open about his sexual orientation within the workplace, thus insinuating an advanced degree of outness. His company has a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender group as a well as a diversity committee, and he is active in both. The group sponsored safe-zone stickers for employees to display in their work areas to show they are supportive of the gay communities and LGBT co-workers. Mark indicated he was the only person in his division with the sticker prominently
displayed, which he in turn felt outing him to co-workers. Mark also shared that his supervisor definitely was aware that he was gay. In discussing his boss’ reaction, he stated, “It is a non-issue for her, and for the company, because they state very clearly that they won’t tolerate discrimination on the basis of any number of factors including sexual orientation,” making his degree of outness much easier to advance. However, later in our conversation, Mark shared that:

There is one other man on my team at work and I know that he is straight and we have never specifically talked about my orientation. I think he knows, but I sometimes feel like it would be uncomfortable to try to talk to him about things because I wouldn’t want him to think I was looking for something that I know is not going to be there.

By his own admission, despite being mostly out and open within his company, Mark was reluctant to discuss his sexual orientation with this particular co-worker and was uncertain how to present his orientation to this co-worker (despite wanting to come out to him). When asked how he thought the co-worker would respond, he indicated that “it probably would not make a whole lot of difference.” Despite this, Mark has yet to advance his degree of outness beyond a closeted status with this individual, further demonstrating that degree and dimensions of outness are negotiated over time.

Another respondent was nearly outing by a co-worker during his career with a private medical hospital. Ken, a 59-year-old administrator, indicated that a disgruntled co-worker was going to go to his supervisor to tell her Ken was gay, so instead Ken used the situation he found himself in to pre-empt the action by coming out to his boss—at once advancing his degree of outness. Her response was “that she had known ever since they hired him,” and Ken indicated she had no negative reaction. Unique to this situation is that Ken decided to
come out to his boss unexpectedly, and he admittedly had not given the prospect of outing himself much thought leading up to his actual conversation with his supervisor, an instance where both advancing his degree of outness and his dimension of outness were negotiated with haste.

Over his long career, Ken referenced different times when he became more comfortable with himself and with discussing his sexual orientation. In the past decade, Ken shared that “I gradually became more open about it and for the last ten years have been quite out, not in a political sort of way; my choice has been largely to live without ever being dishonest but never really broadcasting it either.” He said that he has a bumper sticker of a rainbow flag on his car, and he now assumes that everyone knows he’s gay, putting his degree of outness near full disclosure. Ken acknowledged that his increased willingness to share more about his sexual orientation was tied primarily to the changes in attitudes toward gays and lesbians both within his organization and in the broader society, as well as increased visibility of gays and lesbians. Throughout his entire career, Ken has displayed varied degrees of outness along the continuum, depending on the situations in which he found himself, as he navigated the workplace and his own personal comfort level with his sexual orientation. Ken was (and continues) doing outness.

As established earlier, dimensions of outness are often mediated by situation and circumstances, sometimes tied to one’s perception of safety and security (physical and financial). Ken also shared that in his private practice he typically does not divulge his sexual orientation to clients, but at the same time he and his business partner advertise their services in local gay publications, and when he does have gay clients, he is open with them,
further demonstrating the complexities tied to degree and dimensions of outness. Over the years, Ken claims he has become less reluctant to discuss his orientation with his clients primarily because as his practice has become more successful he can be more selective about whom he takes on as a client. In this particular situation, Ken is selectively sharing his sexual orientation—demonstrating multiple degrees of outness—with clients and potential clients when it appears it might leverage professional success, but has made the decision to not divulge his sexual orientation when the inverse might occur. In this example, Ken’s overall degree of outness is, at least partially, tied to the respondent’s perceptions and the impact on his financial well-being.

Paul, a 42-year-old manager with a telecommunications company, recently went through a divorce and came out as a gay man. His former wife and he both worked for the same company for nearly twenty years. For Paul, coming out was particularly challenging since it was displayed in such a public manner in the workplace due to the divorce. At first Paul attempted to keep to himself, sharing his sexual orientation with only a small group of work colleagues whom he considered friends. However, as Paul has worked through his divorce and personally accepted his sexual orientation, he has become more open about his orientation within the workplace, inching closer to full disclosure relative to his degree of outness in the workplace.

At the same time, Paul has become a bit defiant about his sexual orientation with one group of co-workers. He has shared his sexual orientation with his supervisors and a group of co-workers because of his increased personal acceptance, as well as the fact that rumors were already being spread about his sexual orientation by various co-workers. His response
to this particular group of co-workers was that “I think there are a lot of people that suspect and they probably want to know but won’t come to me directly and ask, and if they are not going to ask, then I won’t say one way or the other.” While Paul claims to not really care who knows and who does not know, and indeed he has shared his orientation with many co-workers, his actions of non-disclosure among those whom he terms the “gossipers” comes across as an act of revenge or a way of letting them know that they did not get the best of him with their rumors. In many ways Paul was “baited” by these individuals prior to coming out to anyone in the company and after coming out to select individuals he refused to give them the satisfaction of confirming that their suspicions were in fact correct. This is an example of dimensions of outness, whereby Paul knows these gossipers are aware of his orientation, but by not telling them, he is intentionally turning the tables on his co-workers by baiting them to ask him directly about his orientation. There is no real secret about the fact he is gay, but the way he is presenting his orientation—in this case through non-presentation—is a calculated decision by Paul as a means of getting back at a group of co-workers, an intentionally elusive dimension of outness.

It is evident in these stories that the gay men in this study advanced their degrees of outness over time, and they display various dimensions of outness in their everyday work lives dependent on specific situation(s). While all of them were out to their supervisors, they were highly selective about who else in their organizations or work lives were privy to information regarding their sexual orientation. In most cases, their own coming out to co-workers evolved over time and they selectively shared their sexual orientation with different groups at different times. Therefore, these examples provide strong evidence of both degree
and dimensions of outness and how they are advanced and played out in the context of the workplace.

Doing outness as a strategy

While degrees and dimensions of outness are important to demonstrate and understand, it is the interplay between dimensions of outness, identities and moments of engagement where the process of doing outness is conducted in the everyday work lives of these men. One of the most interesting findings of this study is tied to the use of doing outness as a strategy for career and workplace advancement. What has allowed this to happen?

I would argue that as gay visibility has increased in America, and as public opinion has become more gay-positive, or at least gay-sensitive, gay men’s degrees and dimensions of outness have been impacted. Suzanna Danuta Walters in her book, All The Rage, which explores gay visibility, states:

For the majority of Americans, gay people were invisible or, worse, despised: unseen, avoided, unknown. The ‘90s burst that all apart and catapulted lesbians and gays into the hearts and homes of everyday Americans. The love that dare not speak its name became the love that would not shut up, proclaiming its rights to be seen and heard from the manicured lawns of suburbia to the tight tenements of our megacities. (Danuta Walters 2001, 29)

If this is true, then much has changed since Woods explored the lives of closeted gay men in corporate America. It is intuitive with the greater visibility (and more out gay men and lesbians in general) that more gay men and lesbians are out at work than were in the early 1990s, making studying this subsection even more important and timely. The options available to gay men and lesbians within the workplace have likely shifted in the past decade.
as well, and workplace policies in the corporate sector have clearly become more gay-friendly. Raeburn (2004) acknowledges that activist employees within organizations and corporations assisted in bringing about many of the shifts toward gay-friendly policies. The activists’ visibility (and willingness to be out in the workplace) proved to be an effective strategy. As discussed the men in my study were also clearly out at work, albeit displaying varying degrees of outness. But what motivated the men in this study to share their sexual orientation with others in the workplace? Were there any strategic benefits of doing outness at work?

Participants often shared the strategies behind divulging their sexual orientation. These strategies were sometimes simply tied to the desire of coming out and being one’s true self in the workplace, while other times it was in situations (moments of engagement) where being out has perceived benefits to one’s workplace success and security. For example, William, a 30-year-old working in the telecommunications industry, referenced an example while working in the retail industry. He shared how his former supervisor, a presumed heterosexual male, surrounded himself with out gay men. When asked how these gay men were treated by the supervisor, William said, “He treated them very well. It was definitely rumored that people who worked for him and were among his closest network within the store were gay men.” He shared a personal story of when he needed additional staff on his team and went into the manager’s office to ask for three more people, and he got them. He also cited that the manager had an open door policy—always available to talk to employees—and it was mostly gay men who took advantage of the policy. William stated, “I didn’t ever hear that from other people on the staff.” When working at a different store for this particular
retail chain, William was out to only a few co-workers, but once he moved to this above-mentioned store, through observing other out gay men in the workplace, he soon determined that being out was an advantage, and quickly came out to all of his co-workers, subordinates, and his supervisor. He became "one of the boys."

William's story further demonstrates the conscious aspect of deciding whether or not to divulge one's orientation (thus advancing his degree of outness), as well as how (and why) he shared his orientation (dimensions of outness) in a very open, matter-of-fact manner. His story of success in the work environment with a gay-friendly boss also demonstrates the importance of situation, which differed from his other experience with the same company at a different location. Finally, William's story illustrates how doing outness was, in fact, a strategy for success within the workplace.

John, a 32-year-old working in the information technology sector, shared a similar advantage to being out when he referred to working for a temporary agency that placed him with an employer who needed a researcher. John was part-time temporary help, but indicated that after he divulged his sexual orientation to his supervisor, another gay man, he was hired full time. John stated, "I'm quite sure that he liked the idea of having me around, he could let his guard down somewhat." Again, John realized that sharing his sexual orientation might in fact have a positive impact on his position, and therefore he shared this information with his employer immediately after learning that his boss also was gay. John admits that based on the fact they shared the same sexual orientation, a natural comfort level quickly evolved, which gave John a unique bond and ability to interact in a different way with the supervisor. John decided to come out based in part on his assumption that he might benefit from their
shared experiences as gay men. John indicated that after this experience he decided that presenting his sexual orientation in a matter-of-fact manner was to his advantage with future employers. He shared his philosophy that

if you treat this as a big deal, it is one. So, when people at work didn’t know I was gay, I would just take my partner or whoever I was seeing at the time to work events. I just took them, I didn’t get all nervous about what they were going to think, and I think that in itself makes it an easier process. If you get all worked up over it, then the other people around you are going to get worked up over it. Get it out there. I don’t think you have to make it a big deal, just do it.

He goes on to say that, in his opinion, people who are closeted are carrying around baggage which makes it hard for them to trust other people, and if “they are not trusting other people, how can they expect other people to trust them?” John’s position on being out is noteworthy because it marks the closet as an unproductive degree of outness based on his own experiences, and indicates a greater willingness and expectation to being out in the workplace.

Similarly, Daryl, a 41-year-old gay man working as a manager in a research and development center, views being out in the workplace as far more strategic then being closeted. Daryl shared the fears of discrimination he held as a young professional, which kept him closeted.

I was on the bottom rung of the ladder, and I guess I was thinking I don’t need something to hold me down, or I don’t need somebody to judge me on this sort of thing when I am not fully confident in the things that I need to do anyway. My skill set was not as developed as I wanted it to be. I didn’t want somebody to judge me on the fact I’m gay. I did fear for my job or promotion.

But eventually Daryl felt that he had to come out, after he realized he was expending a lot of time and effort playing what he called the “pronoun” game when explaining who he was
spending time with outside of work, which in turn detracted from his ability to be effective on the job. He added that

when you are playing that game, trying to keep your identity a secret, people sense it, and there’s a trust factor that they are afraid to trust you and you don’t trust them, obviously you don’t trust them or you’d just tell them. So, that too creates a lot of energy expending that could be focused on your job instead, or networking the way you need to network or want to network.

Daryl talks about the personal revolution he experienced once he decided that being closeted was not an option for him any longer. Indicating that wherever he went, he brought being gay with him. He explained that he “wore it” and was defiantly out in all aspects and situations of his life. In the late 1980s he made the decision to be out at work “because it was a comfortable work environment, a non-judgmental environment, and there were other gay men around, and I felt I could do this, and then there was no going back.” In turn, Daryl found that he was much more light-hearted about his sexual orientation, getting to the point where he could even joke about it with co-workers. The non-judgmental environment, where co-workers did not have a negative opinion of Daryl simply because he was gay, provided an ideal work situation for Daryl to be out in nearly every work interaction he faced, moving toward full disclosure on the degree of outness continuum. As Daryl became more confident in his own work skills and abilities, he became increasingly willing to divulge his sexual orientation in this job and future positions with other employers. In this story Daryl also points out that his self confidence grew as his professional skills grew, implying that as his career grew and thus the demand for his skills, he was more confident in being out within the context of the workplace. These positive situations cumulated over time in a way that shifted Daryl’s perception of the value of being out. Much like John, he views the closet as an
unproductive degree of outness, has experienced positive consequences with being out in the workplace, and uses doing outness as a strategy.

Other study participants shared examples of strategically using their sexual orientation in the workplace. In a previous position with a different company, Tommy shared that he attended a company-wide lesbian and gay employee group meeting because “I felt like I had to have some type of involvement because I thought it was important for them to see someone in human resources felt comfortable in being part of the group.” In this case, Tommy was sharing his sexual orientation to help others in the context of a group meeting of gay and lesbian employees. He wanted other employees to know they had an advocate in the human resources department. Tommy did so in an environment where he worked for many years and was very comfortable with his co-workers and supervisors, and with being out. He displayed a relatively high degree of outness prior to attending the meeting where he came out to a wider audience, many of whom were strangers. This experience, contrasted with his new work environment discussed earlier, speaks to the reality that degrees and dimensions of outness are highly influenced by perceived benefits (or costs) to being out, as well as situations within the workplace that allow (or hinder) one’s ability to come out. In this case, the group meeting provided a situation for Tommy to come out, and given that the participants were also gay, his dimensions of outness—the way he presented his orientation—was one of a proud, out gay man (much like the rest in this group of men and women).

In another story shared by Tommy, he indicated that when he started his new position he interviewed a man he thought might be gay and after he was hired, made an effort to put
himself into situations with the new hire where he could start conversations with the employee, only to end up coming out to each other. Tommy had a similar situation where a lesbian co-worker came out to him. He stated, “You identify people that you think, or are pretty sure, are gay and you wiggle it into the conversation. You drop terms to see how they react and that is how it happens.” In these examples, Tommy was doing outness to identify other gay men and lesbians and advancing both his degree of outness within his new company as well as his dimensions of outness. Note the careful attention Tommy paid to setting up situations—moments of engagement—where he could test the sexual orientation waters by using specific and strategic language in an effort to determine the sexual orientation of others. As he became acquainted with his new workplace, in an effort to advance his degree of outness, Tommy strategically put himself into workplace situations where he could come out and begin building a gay social network within the company, thus doing outness to his advantage and as a specific strategy (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4).

Rich also acknowledges that his supervisor often seeks his advice on issues because “I am good at what I do, and have a tremendous amount of life experience and I view things in a way that he cannot get his mind to view.” He attributes the differences between his gay life experiences and his boss’ heterosexual life experiences as the reason and source for why his boss seeks his advice on various client-related issues. In the examples, doing outness is a perceived advantage both for Rich as well as a resource for his supervisor to tap. Rich’s explanation of his different life experiences as a gay man offers some anecdotal evidence that diversity (and difference) benefits the workplace, and in this case the company’s overall
success. In this example, Rich is using what Raeburn (2004) mentioned as the human resource paradigm that positions diversity as an asset to corporate success. He achieved this by making a decision to come out to his boss, and over time via various interactions, demonstrated a diversity of life experiences to his supervisor in a way that led his supervisor to come back to him for advice. This strategic positioning gives Rich a significant amount of influence with his supervisor, and clearly offers him an advantage in the workplace.

While doing outness may be strategic, there is also risk that must be mediated when making decisions about divulging one’s sexual orientation. Take William, for instance, who offered examples of work situations where his degree of outness was, for the most part, completely out to everyone in the workplace. It should be noted, however, that even William, who talked about how being an out gay man positioned him positively with his supervisor, has since switched jobs, and in his current position displays different degrees and dimensions of outness. In his current position, he is out to his co-workers and supervisors, but, despite his position of power, not all of his subordinates. William acknowledges his success as a manager is at the very core of his success within the company, and the uncertainty of how his subordinates might react to his sexual orientation has led him to not divulge to everyone, in part due to the fear that it could jeopardize his relationship with subordinates and therefore his overall job performance and credibility. He therefore assesses each situation and interaction with individuals on his team to determine if and when he might come out to them. Over time he has come out to more of his team members, but still not all of them. Doing outness is fluid and must be negotiated each time one’s work situation changes.
Impact of identities on strategy

While the previous section offered examples of how doing outness has been used by gay white men in this study to strategically position or advance themselves, what role(s) does identity play in their overall strategy? The previous section focused primarily on the dimensions and degrees of outness, but as stated earlier, identity is a key active component of doing outness. The section to follow offers examples of gay men from the study who used specific identities, coupled with their dimensions of outness, to strategically advance themselves within their workplaces.

Albert, a 48-year-old software developer working in the publishing industry, indicated that he was outed by accident in the 1970s, when he printed some personal materials on an office printer. The materials were retrieved by a co-worker and shared among others in the company. Albert indicates that there were virtually no reactions at the time, mostly just rumors about his private life. Years later Albert became much more open about his sexual orientation. Men in this study often used their private lives—their partners or significant others—as part of their coming out experience in the workplace. Albert shared a specific situation where his new boss, the vice-president, took him and several other senior managers out to dinner in an effort to get to know her new staff. At the dinner she inquired about their spouses and Albert shared when he and his partner “met and moved in together.” He indicated that her reaction was very matter of fact and she was very comfortable learning this information. In this particular situation Albert combined all three elements of doing outness based on a situation—or moment of engagement—whereby supportive co-workers were present at the dinner with his boss, and he made his orientation known to his new boss in a
very matter-of-fact, assimilationist manner. In the context of the conversation, Albert used his monogamous, committed relationship (portrayed similarly to how the heterosexual dinner guests shared their own stories about spouses) as a way of coming out. He called upon a familiar identity to most dinner participants, including the boss who herself was married, by discussing his life with his partner very similarly to how others talked about their spouses. Through doing outness Albert used this situation strategically to manage his supervisor’s reaction to his revelation.

It is important to acknowledge that the men who chose to call upon identities tied to their personal relationships demonstrate the overlap between institutions, the merging of family and work lives, which in turn merges their institutional outness. By calling upon elements of their home lives, they were able to establish their degree and dimension of outness in their work environment. This also demonstrates the fluidity of outness and the complexity of doing outness as identities developed within one social institution, which are often compartmentalized by gays, can be woven in and out of other social institutions.

Albert also stated that “I’ve tried to do my part to further visibility by being open and not making a big production by saying I’m gay, but if somebody’s talking about their husband or wife, I will say something about my partner.” Albert also indicated that he has a photo of his partner on his desk, so no matter who is in his office, a co-worker, friend or stranger, there is evidence of his private life for everyone to view. While subtle, he also used these situations to do outness without having to necessarily discuss his orientation directly, but also presented his sexual orientation in a familiar (photos on the desk), non-threatening
manner. He was using his identity as a man in a committed, monogamous relationship as a means for introducing his sexual orientation.

Similarly, Rich decided to come out to his co-workers at a holiday party by bringing his partner to the event. He said reactions were varied, but the experience offered a way to educate co-workers.

There were some people there that didn’t know anyone gay. One of our really good financial planners is very Catholic and she has by far the most wholesome family I know, and this was a bit of an eye-opener for her. I know at least one other gentleman in the company that it was an eye-opener for also. But, because it was not a big deal to me, it was just natural, they had all the latitude they needed to be okay with it and ask questions about it or address concerns about me being gay. Eventually they came around to recognize me as an asset.

By presenting his gay relationship as natural and not that much different than the other couples present at the party, Rich was strategically using the situation to establish his dimension of outness by calling upon an identity of committed partner, which was likely familiar to others at the party who were with their spouses, and would likely make his coming out a bit easier in the long-run.

While Rich is open about his sexual orientation with co-workers, he is more cautious, as a financial planner, when working with clients. He acknowledged that most of his clients are straight and that he does not necessarily discuss his personal life with them. He indicated that he is out to his gay and lesbian clients. However, he shared a story of attending a city council meeting where adding sexual orientation to the city’s non-discrimination policy was being discussed and he happened to be photographed. The photo appeared on the front page of the local paper the following day. As it turns out, Rich had an appointment that day with a conservative client and he was very concerned that she had read the paper. Rich shared that
she lost her husband five years ago and I was sensitive to what was going on in her life and the other (straight) financial advisors that she’d worked with didn’t have a clue, they were just missing it. Well, I rounded the corner of my office and she was standing there and she says, “I’m glad you are my friend” and she gives me a big hug. It was an incredible experience.

Rich confirmed that her reaction was indeed tied to the newspaper photo of him at the city council meeting. They went on to have conversations about a friend of hers who was deeply closeted and about whom she was concerned. In these situations Rich took some calculated risks in actually sharing his orientation (not denying why he was in the newspaper photo) and establishing his dimension of outness with the client without any real preparation leading up to this meeting, which turned out to be a positive situation for him. Because his client discussed her deeply closeted friend, Rich was able to call upon a more sensitive gay identity when talking with her and offering advice about her friend based on his own life experiences. In this case, the use of this identity was called upon after the dimension of outness was established. This story offers another example of Rich doing outness.

Gary, a 40-year-old human resources consultant in the banking industry, discussed interactions with senior level gay men in his company, and shared a work situation where he realized it was alright to be out in his company when he walked into a senior level executive meeting and the “leaders walked into the room and talked openly about their partners with other heads of the company sitting in the room. It did not phase them, it was not an issue.” After that experience, Gary began determining how he would do the same—begin talking more openly about his sexual orientation, realizing his identity as a gay man, and sharing his orientation could in fact be to his advantage, especially with this particular group of leaders. Gary was looking for a way to be more open about his orientation, and due to this particular
moment of engagement with other leaders who were gay, he modeled his own dimensions of outness after their approach. This matter-of-fact approach of doing outness was prevalent among men throughout this study.

Assimilation and accommodation in the context of doing outness

While the stories shared earlier in this chapter demonstrate the process of doing outness and specifically how individuals establish their degree and dimensions of outness tied to specific situations and use of different identities, another common thread emerged in these and other stories. Take John, Daryl, Albert and other’s stories for instance. In each case they have approached the disclosure of their sexual orientation as “matter-of-fact” and not something that needed to be made into a big announcement or ordeal or portrayed as something “different.” On the dimensions of outness continuum, no one shared stories of using activism or even stories that demonstrated difference when coming out. They each strategically normalized their sexual orientation by simply contributing to conversations with co-workers or supervisors or having family photos on their desk no differently than co-workers displayed. This represents more of an assimilationist approach to their sexual orientation, in that their lives and relationships—their identities—are presented as being not that much different than the lives of their heterosexual work counterparts. Evident in their accounts of their work interactions and experiences, this approach appears to have been effective for them within their work environments. Seidman argues that as gays are viewed as normal, they are no longer necessarily associated with the bad sexual citizen. The hetero/homosexual division came to serve as an important regulatory force. This has changed somewhat as gays are viewed as normal; designation as the good or bad sexual citizen is less dependent on sexual identity.
The bad citizen today is someone who violates romantic, intimate, familial norms, regardless of his or her sexual identity. (Seidman 2002, 160)

If this is true, then the fact that these men had “partners” and were in committed relationships, which they spoke of openly, could, in fact, be a benefit in the workplace and could definitely facilitate their degrees and dimensions of outness.

Another interesting finding is that many men in this study used symbols as a method of testing the waters or sharing their sexual orientation widely without talking directly about it. Whether it was photos of significant others, stickers on cars, or posted signs in their offices, over and over men in this study indicated the use of these symbols as a way of stating they were gay men. Symbols, such as photos of partners on desks, are another way to normalize sexual orientation, in this case copying the common practices of heterosexual co-workers, while signifying that a similar, monogamous relationship exists in the lives of these out gay men. Posted signs in offices, often those sanctioned by the company (in the case of Mark) or community events (in the case of the Gay Men’s Chorus signs in Daryl’s office), are another form of normalization, given the close connections these symbols have to workplace or community endorsed events or practices.

Many participants eased into coming out to colleagues and supervisors, and a significant number mentioned a matter-of-fact approach to their dimensions of outness as opposed to a more activist, in-your-face, approach. This matter-of-fact approach is one rooted in demonstrating to those around you that you are comfortable (and not ashamed) of your sexual orientation, but also that you do not plan on making it an issue in the workplace, basically accommodating the dominant cultural workplace norms. Seidman refers to this accommodation as being a “normal gay” wherein the expectations include
to be gender conventional, link sex to love and a marriage-like relationship, defend family values, personify economic individualism, and display national pride. Although normalization makes it possible for individuals to conduct lives of integrity, it also establishes a moral and social divide among gays. (Seidman 2002, 160)

Additionally, in some situations shared by respondents, there was agency, or value, in doing outness as in the cases of William and John, for example. Additionally, the self-confidence demonstrated with being out cannot be downplayed, and is also a part of the negotiation process of doing outness.

As mentioned earlier, Rose Weitz (2004) found similar examples of accommodation for women in the hairstyles they chose to wear in their everyday lives. Her findings offer an analogy to what gay men in this study experienced (with a few distinctions). Through doing outness gay men were making choices based on how to achieve their goals and perceived benefits and chose a technique or path for divulging their orientation that caused the least resistance and reaction in the workplace. Several respondents discussed the energy and time expended in hiding their orientation, which also served as a motivation for coming out (albeit sometimes over a period of time) within the workplace. However, the men in this study were also using time and energy in doing outness, which aligns with Weitz’s idea that they too are not “free agents,” but rather caught up in a process whereby everyday decisions need to be made which impact survival or failure within the workplace, to follow or debunk cultural expectations. When gay men chose the matter-of-fact approach to sharing their orientation through the use of assimilationist identities—followed by what they mostly described as a successful coming out process—they learned or practiced a culturally acceptable way of doing outness. John and Daryl both spoke of how they used this practice time and time again in their work environments and when embarking upon new jobs in new environments.
It is noteworthy that no one in this study shared experiences where doing outness within the workplace was deliberately done in a controversial or in-your-face manner. However, in my conversation with John, he did indicate that he was certain that there are boundaries to what would be deemed acceptable in the workplace, and that if gay men revealed too much about their private lives, particularly those men who are part of subcultures within the gay communities, that they would not be necessarily accepted. He is aware of several men who are part of the leather community outside of work, but would never discuss these identities at work for fear of negative reactions. While these men were out at work, they were not explicit about their life experiences outside of work, instead choosing identities that co-workers could accept. This demonstrates how dimensions of outness—choosing how one will present his orientation—work, and further suggests that Seidman (2002) may be correct in distinguishing between the “normal” gay and others. John’s example of his friends demonstrates dimensions of these men’s lives that they kept hidden, yet more evidence of the complex process of doing outness.

**Coming out early as a strategy**

Another observation among several gay men in this study is that they chose to be out up front. In other words, several indicated that they divulged their sexual orientation during the interview process for their current positions. Some chose to use interview situations in an effort to determine whether or not the company would be accepting of a gay employee, while most did it simply in the course of conversations. In this case, these individuals were using the interview situation to instantly advance their degree of outness as well as establish their
dimension of outness, albeit without any previous situations to use as a guide for how best to reveal their orientation. Their method of doing outness in these cases was to not rely on the opportunities to set the stage prior to coming out (as was discussed earlier relative to how identities can be used to “soften the blow” of how people might react to one’s orientation).

For example, when negotiating for his current position, William indicated:

when I was interviewing I came right out to my interviewing supervisor and told her I was gay and had a partner and that I was concerned with the hours she was proposing and how it might impact my relationship. She assured me there would be opportunity to move up and move out of evening hours so I could spend time with my partner.

In this case, the supervisor was reassuring and affirming, which indicated to William that his sexual orientation would not be a problem with this supervisor. It was also a way for William to establish an identity of a gay man in a committed relationship, and demonstrate the importance of that relationship. One could argue this was a normalizing or assimilationist approach to outing himself. He presented his orientation in the course of the conversation in a rather nonchalant manner, and his soon-to-be supervisor responded in her own matter-of-fact manner to the revelation.

Dennis, a 49-year-old man working in the publishing industry, indicated that he was referred by a gay man within the company for his current position, and assumed, through word of mouth, that those who interviewed him knew he was gay before he ever showed up for the interview. Shortly after being hired, Dennis, who performs in the local gay men’s chorus, posted a sign in his office announcing an upcoming concert. He stated that “the way I came out most directly was when I posted the announcement about the Chorus that I was going to be singing in—that pretty much said it all.” Dennis indicated that several people inquired about the poster and pending concert, but overall there was no negative reaction to
the poster. Dennis used his own personal space—his office—to subtly share his orientation with co-workers as situations arose through their entering his workspace and seeing (and inquiring about) the poster—a marker, or symbol, of his orientation. He also shared that two of his immediate supervisors attended the concert. Dennis’ behavior mirrors that of other men in the study—the use of a nonchalant approach to expressing and normalizing sexual orientation, even before taking the opportunity to establish relationships with co-workers by coming out very early in his tenure with the company.

Concluding thoughts on doing outness

Evident in the stories of the gay men in this study is the reality that doing outness in the workplace was, in part, driven and determined by the perceived benefit to being out in the workplace and in part by the perceived safety of coming out in certain situations. Even beyond the perceived benefit and sheer safety, these stories often indicate that men were doing outness strategically within the workplace—to form strong alliances with supervisors or to form gay social networks. While the ways in which gay men in this study are doing outness to navigate the workplace appears to have become a successful technique, dominant cultural expectations and controls are still widely active in the daily lives of gay men. Although gay men have found some successful and acceptable ways to be out in the workplace, there is still a significant burden that these gay men must bare in the workplace—from determining if they should come out to when and how they do come out, all require a significant amount of energy and risk on the part of gay men, something that is otherwise taken for granted by heterosexual white men and the dominant workplace culture.
As is demonstrated throughout these examples, doing outness was used strategically in various work situations. It was clear throughout the interviews that these men were very consciously making decisions about when and how to share their sexual orientation, and made these decisions based on perceived benefit or detriment to their careers and/or work relationships with co-workers or supervisors. The ability for gay men to institutionally expose or hide their sexual orientation is a key ingredient to understanding how gay men navigate the workplace, and is a unique quality of sexual orientation, unlike race or gender which are far less elusive. In the examples of these out gay men, the timing of their revelations—whether after many years with a company or in their first interview before being hired—were contemplated, assessed, and occurred when the perceived benefit outweighed the perceived cost within specific social contexts. This strategy was starkly evident throughout the interviews. Respondents were asked for situations where their sexual orientation was problematic or caused them difficulties within the workplace, and very few examples were offered. However, evidence is strong that doing outness within the workplace is intricately tied to how gay men navigate the workplace.

**Compare and contrast: The closet as a degree and dimension of outness**

While most of this chapter focuses on out gay men, and how doing outness impacts their work lives, three respondents in this study were actually closeted (or displayed no degree of outness at the workplace level). Though a sample of three is hardly representative of all closeted gay men, their radically different work experiences were difficult to ignore and require further study and analysis. For the purpose of exploiting these contrasts, take the
stories of Daniel, Rob, and James. Daniel, 56, is part-owner of an insurance wholesaler brokerage company. He owns 30 percent interest in the company and works with a “conservative” co-owner who controls 70 percent of the company. Daniel and his business partner have worked together for over 16 years. James, 43, is a franchise owner of a retail store. While he is part of the larger company, in many ways, because he owns his own store, James is self-employed. Rob, 39, is a computer technician for a computer reseller and service company. Rob has been with the company for over nine years.

Daniel has been out to himself for just over two years and recently went through a divorce after 32 years of marriage. Daniel indicated that he is not out to anyone at his office, including his business partner. When asked how his partner might react, Daniel shared, “I think that my business partner knows, but I am not certain. But, we have never discussed it and my guess is that he would be very homophobic.” However, after talking with Daniel in greater detail, he indicated that there was an out gay man working for the company. This out gay man actually brought his partner to a company holiday party. When I inquired how his business partner reacted, he stated, “He never really reacted negatively.” Daniel shared that he really wants to come out to people at the office and generally believes most of his employees would be supportive. However, he believes that his top producing employee would react negatively. “There are a couple I could tell without worrying about a negative reaction, but there is one in my department that does more business than anyone else, I really depend on him, and I have a feeling he’d react negatively.” He admitted that his greatest fear was not that he’d lose his job (since he is part owner, he cannot be fired), but rather, “this one fellow in particular that would react negatively, Terry, he does an awful lot of business and I
depend on his cooperation. He's the best salesman I have.” In this example, Daniel’s
decision to remain closeted is, in part, tied to his fear of reactions from co-workers, but
specifically his fear of lost revenue is tied to one particular employee. His story also
demonstrates that without advancing one’s degree of outness, the ability to do outness in a
way that could potentially provide workplace benefit cannot be realized.

Similarly, James indicated that he cannot be fired from his position because he is an
owner of his store. While this store is located in a rural area on the outskirts of a
metropolitan area, James shared that divulging his sexual orientation within this small
community might jeopardize sales. He stated, “With small town retail you have to be careful,
it’s part of why I am not real out.” He did indicate, however, that some people in his town
are aware of his sexual orientation, but likely not most of his customers or his employees.
When asked how they might react if they found out, James said, “For the most part most of
them would not care. And there are some of them that I think have figured it out. It’s just
something we do not talk about.”

Finally, Rob indicated that he is not out at work but that if he were “I don’t think they
would care. It’s not something they would worry about. I am a normal, adjusted person at
work and always get my work done.” Rob assumed there might be other gay men in his
company, but he did not know any. He also works with a group of clients and indicated that
he has met several gay men who were clients, but only one to whom he came out. In that
particular situation, the client asked him if he was gay and he said, “Yes,” which Rob
indicated he would do in any situation if asked about his sexual orientation.
From these three interviews with closeted gay men in the workplace (but not closeted outside of work), it is evident that their workplace experiences, how they do outness, and subsequently how they navigate their work environments significantly contrast with those described earlier in the chapter who have advanced their degree of outness beyond being closeted. This also demonstrates the stark difference between institutional outness, the first, macro level at which people determine whether or not to divulge their sexual orientation, and degrees and dimensions of outness, whereby individuals have decided to at least share their orientation to some degree within the larger social organization. One interesting contrast gleaned from the closeted men in this study is that they never reached a point whereby they determined how to use their sexual orientation as a successful and positive strategy within the workplace, a nuance available only to men who display at least some degree of outness. Additionally, these men perceived that if they displayed any degree or dimensions of outness in the workplace a negative consequence could (and likely would) occur as a result. Instead they chose to use their closeted state as their strategy of doing outness and for how they navigate the workplace. However, this choice was rooted primarily in fear and not in as a deliberate manner as those with advanced degrees of outness used their sexual orientation.

These men also expended significant amounts of energy in keeping their sexual orientation a secret in spite of perceptions that supervisors and colleagues would not take issue with their orientation. In situations where colleagues and supervisors were deemed to suspect that these men were in fact gay, one must question whether or not non-disclosure is actually a detriment to these men’s workplace success, given the shifting cultural expectations of sexual orientation in the workplace that appeared in the stories of other men.
in this study. While these examples are tied strictly to the workplace, they do mirror the research conducted by Thomas Linneman on the everyday lives of gay men, and the fact that two types of behavioral patterns can be observed in gay men. His research focused on the risks gay men were willing to take in their everyday lives and found that although fear is a common excuse for lack of involvement, these activists feel that it is an unfounded fear. If people just got involved, they would realize that nothing would happen to them. A concern among these activists, then, is how to break through people's false consciousness. (Linneman 2000, 95)

Further exploration of these dynamics is needed to fully understand the advantages and disadvantages closeted men face based on their decisions to remain closeted at work.

**Summary**

Chapter 2 outlined the key concepts of institutional outness, degree of outness, and dimensions of outness, coupled with the concepts of identities and moments of engagement to advance a new model for doing outness. In Chapter 3 the stories of gay white men in the workplace demonstrated how the interplay between dimensions of outness, identities, and moments of engagement create a process for doing outness. The stories of gay white men in this study also demonstrated an ability for these men to advance professionally, or at minimum ensure a positive workplace experience, through doing outness. Another interesting observation of the men in this study is that they chose to mostly call upon traditional identities—ones to which their straight counterparts could relate—and presented their dimensions of outness in a manner that was matter-of-fact and sure to not create any workplace disturbances. While the model allows for more activist approaches to doing outness, the respondents in this study, for the most part, did not utilize these approaches and
did not have any political or social movement motivations tied to their coming out. This likely played a role in whether or not they were able to do outness in a way that facilitated a successful navigation of the workplace.

In the next two chapters, I will explore how moments of engagement tied to sexual orientation—interactions with homosexuals and heterosexuals in the workplace—are negotiated by the respondents in this study. These chapters will look at whether or not gay white men are doing outness differently depending on whether or not those they are interacting with at work are gay or straight and how doing outness in these interactions impacts their workplace navigation.
CHAPTER 4: ENGAGING GAYNESS

It is essential to look at how gay men do outness with other gays as it relates to the workplace because this knowledge helps advance a more thorough understanding of how gay men navigate their workplaces. The gay men in this study provided specific examples, narrative descriptions, of how they engage and interact with other gay men and sometimes lesbians in the workplace. By looking at these moments of engagement, we can better understand how gay men navigate relationships with other gays and if this impacts successful navigation of their workplaces. Additionally, it is important to determine if doing outness facilitates gay men's ability to network among themselves, or in the larger gay communities, as a means of navigating the workplace. The participants in this study offered numerous examples of networking among gay men (and to a lesser degree, lesbians) both within their workplaces as well as within the larger gay communities, thus combining two social institutions in which they display institutional outness. Examination of how these networks function also furthers an understanding of the work lives of gay men.

Networks

Networking definitely appears to be a practice very common among gay men in this study. However, networking is not new to the gay and lesbian community. Raeburn (2004) attributes much of the success in changing corporate policies to reflect a more gay-friendly stance to the ability for workplace activists in the early 1990s to network with one another across corporations. She traces the history of these network formations, and attributes the internet as a primary source for how workplace activists reached out to other workplace
activists throughout the country, which began a process whereby information, particularly strategies for success, was disseminated. This was followed by a rise in the number of workplace conferences held throughout the country for the purpose of advancing gay and lesbian workplace rights. Finally Raeburn looks at how national LGBT groups joined the movement by devoting resources and attention to workplace issues. Raeburn argues that “this infrastructure has helped sustain the movement amid hostile conditions in the corporate and sociopolitical climates” (Raeburn 2004, 106). Evident in her research, networks played a significant role in the adoption and diffusion of gay-friendly workplace policies in the 1990s. However, do personal networks, those developed in the workplace and outside the workplace in other institutions, advance individual gay and lesbian successful workplace navigation?

From the respondents in this study, it became quite evident that both formal and informal gay networks played a significant role in how gay men found work, as well as how they navigated the workplace once in it. The majority of out gay men referenced relying on friends and larger social networks to identify good companies to work for, and often which departments within a specific company offered the best environments for gay men. Once working within these companies, several respondents became active members in the informal networks whereby they recruited or referred other gay men to the companies for which they worked. A few respondents even used these networks to acquire new clients.

**Informal networks**

When asked why he felt comfortable making a major move and career change to work in the publishing industry, Dennis stated:
It's called gaydar, not only that, but it is just that in many cases I knew a number of them (current employees of the company) before I moved here because I have been active in the Garden Writer’s Association. There are probably twenty members in the group here and at least three of them are gay or lesbian. They had contacts within this company.

By doing outness Dennis informally networked within this association to learn more about his eventual employer, as well as a means to meet other gay men working for the company. He felt well connected within the company before making a decision to leave his job and join this particular publishing company. He adds, “I think that a partial factor in my decision to come here is that several of the gay garden writers I knew were good friends of mine and they spoke highly of the company and its welcoming nature.” It should be noted that Dennis also networked with several straight members of the Writer’s Association who also confirmed his future employer’s environment for gays. He added that one woman in particular, who was heterosexual, later told him that her sister recently came out as a lesbian and asked Dennis if he would help her get connected in the gay communities, further affirming to Dennis that his gay identity was useful in networking both within and external to the gay communities.

Through an elaborate combination of his coming out, using his gay identity, and moments of engagement with members of the association and employees of his eventual employer, Dennis found that through doing outness he effectively networked himself with people who gave him sound advice about choosing his new employer.

Once Dennis decided to aggressively pursue employment with the company, he indicated that a gay man, already employed by the company, played an active (albeit informal) role in recruiting him to the company. He acknowledges that once he began his new position that “he invited me to his home with his partner to introduce me to some of his
gay friends and other people in the neighborhood right after I started.” In essence, from the beginning of the process of considering employment with this company, through the interview process and in his initial time with the company, Dennis, by doing outness, was informally networked with gay men familiar with and working for the company. Many of his decisions were influenced by the network of people who counseled him on the company culture. The use of his dimensions of outness and the fact that he displayed a gay identity among both gay and straight individuals affiliated with the company played a major role in how he negotiated whether or not a gay man would succeed with this particular company, and eventually how he came to join this particular company. This type of corporate “testing” was common among respondents in this study.

Curt shared that he often met other gay men outside of work, in social settings, that also worked at his company. For instance:

The house across the street was up for sale not long ago and my partner and I went across the street to see it and the real estate agent was getting coffee for another man who happened to be his partner. Well, within a few minutes of chatting, I found out he was a senior director within my company. We talked a bit longer and found out that my former boss, who was also gay, knew this guy.

Curt still keeps in touch with this new business acquaintance. This is not the first time Curt met other colleagues outside the workplace in informal settings. He also shared that shortly after meeting his current partner, his partner introduced him to a friend of his who happened to be a gay vice president with the company. The social networks outside the corporate setting and within larger gay communities were tapped through the use of informal networks closely tied to doing outness within the context of multiple institutions. Doing outness within the context of these other social institutions such as his neighborhood and the wider
urban gay communities also influenced his ability to make sound decisions about his employer and successfully use these networks to navigate his work life. Curt often pointed out that these networks benefited him socially while at work, as well as professionally, by getting to know key employees within his company, including a vice president. Curt’s example demonstrates the interplay and inter-relatedness of institutional outness, dimensions of outness, and a gay identity in the process of doing outness.

When asked whether or not he and those in his social circles helped each other find employment, Curt responded, “Oh, yes, especially in last couple of years, God yes.” He stated that job opportunities were a common discussion point at various gay and lesbian social functions he and his partner attend, which included a lot of networking and information sharing about companies and jobs that might be of interest to people looking for new positions.

John discussed a similar perspective in that he often shares job opportunities with friends and other gay men in the community. He acknowledged that “informal organizations exist where gay people talk among friends about companies that are good to work for.” John also recruits other gay men to apply for jobs within his own company. He stated, “My company is a great company for gay people to come to work at so I have invited lots of people to apply and many have applied and gotten jobs.” In a competitive job market, John is doing outness to attract other gay men to his company in an effort to make his company more successful.
**Formal networks**

John also participates in a formal gay business networking group called PEN (Potomac Executive Network), which comprises gay professionals who meet monthly. John describes it as “an opportunity if you are gay and you have your own business, for example, to meet others and find other gay men you could work with. It’s a way to give other gay people opportunities.” Within gay business networks such as PEN, gay men do outness. Organizations of this nature allow gay men who may not be out in certain social contexts (including the workplace) to do outness within this organization for the sake of their professional advantage. This also demonstrates the role of institutional outness in the lives of gay men. By having outlets such as PEN, gay men who compartmentalize their lives can be out in the context of these meeting, gather important information and contacts, but still display a low or closeted degree of outness in their work lives, thus doing outness differently in the two social contexts of an organization such as PEN (in the larger gay community) and the workplace.

Similarly, Rich is involved in a gay breakfast club that also meets monthly. Part of this group’s mission is to provide networking opportunities, many of which, according to Rich, are tied to professional opportunities. He referenced that it is not uncommon to talk in small groups at these functions about various company cultures or jobs that are currently open. Additionally, Rich, through doing outness, has used the breakfast club as a place to attract new clients to his own business. He feels that the gay communities look out for one another and that “once you get into the circle, social circle of gay friends, there is a fair amount of support that is occurring.”
Curt indicated that his company has a formal gay and lesbian networking group, and that his company actively supports gay and lesbian issues within the communities. Therefore, even before beginning to work for the company, he was very much aware that the company had a solid reputation within the gay communities, increasing its attractiveness as a place to work. This provides a good example of what Raeburn (2004) described as the efforts of workplace activists coupled with corporations' willingness to create LGBT employee groups. Curt shared that the purpose of the group is “to meet other gays and lesbians and focus on making the company more profitable, share ideas, and fund charity and community service projects, as well as work within the company to make it a better place to work.” Curt indicated that several hundred employees are members of the networking group. Such groups provide a structured forum for gays to do outness in the context of their workplaces and with the goal of advancing their company’s success.

Referral systems

Other men in the study simply discussed more of a referral system in how they networked with other gay men. For instance, Daryl indicated that his last two jobs were the result of another gay man recommending the position to him and recommending him for the position with contacts of his at each company. Through his own social networks, Daryl does the same for other gay men. He shared that there is definitely a network at play, especially in this economic environment where people are looking for jobs. I am always going to watch out for anyone in the Chorus (Gay Men’s Chorus). There is a very strong network among chorus members and if someone is looking for a job—I may not know them—but I have some time for them.
When asked if he was doing this simply because these men were gay, Daryl responded that he’d help out a lot of people, “but if you are gay, I will go the extra distance.” The presence of a gay identity in this case would cause Daryl to provide additional support, thus denoting a certain privilege associated with doing outness.

**The role of networks**

Evident in the examples offered by the out gay men in this study, networking among them clearly plays a significant role in how they determine where they will seek employment. Doing outness, in the social context of professional gay networks or more informal friendship circles, is evident throughout the life experiences referenced by gay men in this study. This points to the likelihood that out gay men conduct a significant level of screening of other gay-identified individuals when considering a potential employer before seeking or accepting career moves. This networking occurs in various forms, including both formal and informal networks. Several respondents in this study work for companies who sponsor formal networking opportunities for gays and lesbians, while several respondents are affiliated with formal networking groups within the larger gay communities in their locales. Networking within smaller circles of friends or among co-workers was often cited and appears to be a common practice for these out gay men.

Clearly, networking plays a significant role in how gay men navigate their professional lives as well as their specific workplaces. In fact, the networking among gay men in this study appears to be embedded in their everyday actions, evident in the anecdotal statement made by Mark, when he remarked, “If I was aware of a company that practiced
covert discrimination, I would make sure people knew about it. I would feel remiss in my responsibility to them as an acquaintance or friend if I didn’t say something.” The use of the phrase “my responsibility” further iterates the interconnectedness of the gay communities and the notion that members within the communities, at least at a macro-institutional level, take care of or look out for each other. All of this is accomplished through the process of doing outness in multiple social contexts.

While not specifically analyzed in this study, one must question if closeted gay men would be able to tap into these or comparable social networks. If they are not institutionally out within the workplace, these workplace and informal networks may very well be invisible to inaccessible to these individuals, but since institutional outness allows individuals to be out within other social institutions, it is possible that even closeted gay men can access formal and informal networks outside the workplace to still guide their workplace decisions.

**Gay-on-gay interactions**

Gay men not only participate in formal and informal networks and referral systems, but also have significant interactions on an individual, often one-on-one, basis with other gay co-workers. Many examples surfaced during interviews where gay men participated in frequent situations—moments of engagement—with other gay men in the workplace, relying on doing outness with these gay men in an effort to navigate the workplace. These interactions take on various meanings, ranging from mentoring opportunities, to issues of favoritism, to simply socializing at the workplace.
Gay-on-gay interactions: Mentoring

Take Ken, for instance, who talks of mentoring younger professionals within the psychiatry profession.

I like being a supervisor for med students and residents, and I did have relationships with people who are not gay, but I think that there was a sense of having something more to offer because there were not very many physicians that were out. One thing we had to do was address our relationships with patients, so I was able to address issues that you would not with someone who is heterosexual. Often you talk about sexual feelings toward patients with students or residents, but I do not think most of the residents who were gay had an opportunity to talk to many other supervising psychiatrists who were also gay and would understand.

Ken mentioned that he felt a responsibility to mentor gay students and residents. Similarly, John proudly spoke of mentoring several gay men within his company. He went as far as to say that his boss intentionally paired suspected gay men with John in an effort to match them with someone they would have something in common with and with whom they would feel more comfortable. While his boss’ practice is somewhat rooted in stereotypes, John seemed quite comfortable, in fact supportive, of this practice.

Curt mentioned that his former boss was an out gay man. In discussing what this experience was like for him, Curt shared that it was a very positive experience, and that he still seeks out his former supervisor’s advice and mentoring. Most importantly, he said learning he had a gay boss “was a great experience because it was a huge weight off my shoulders at that particular time,” which was early in his tenure with the company. In all three of these examples, the men are doing outness with other gay men with whom they have mentoring relationships.
Gay-on-gay interactions: Issues of favoritism

Tommy admits that as a supervisor he is somewhat guilty of being reluctant to take disciplinary actions against someone he knows is gay. He stated, “I probably look out for my brother, so to speak, a little bit more than someone who is not gay. I want to make sure everyone has a fair opportunity, and if I can help someone, I will.” In this situation, for Tommy, there is clearly a different nuance to the relationship with gay-identified subordinates that is directly tied to their sexual orientation, presence of gay identities, and doing outness.

Conversely, William shared a story where he indicated he holds his gay subordinates to even higher work standards, admittedly so that it does not appear he is giving them preferential treatment of any kind. William indicated that he is much more inclined to have social relationships at work with other gay men, and it happens that a few of them are on the team he directly manages. Since other employees witness the more frequent social interaction (at breaks and “down time”) between William and the gay subordinates, he will “ride them harder or performance manage them harder than I would another person to over compensate for people thinking I am giving them preferential treatment. They would not think that I was a gay man giving another gay person special help or special projects.” William’s management practices are directly influenced by doing outness, in this case a conscious effort to demonstrate that he will not give preferential treatment to other gay employees simply because he himself is gay.
Gay-on-gay interactions: Socializing

When asked who the gay men preferred socializing with while at work, nearly all of them shared a preference for socializing with other gay men. While it was not practical in all cases (due to a low number of gay colleagues), it was clearly the preference of the vast majority of respondents. Many of the men in the study shared stories of spending lunches with gay co-workers, as well as going out for drinks after work with gay colleagues—all a part of doing outness. William, for example, stated that he socializes after work with several other gay men for “just venting. Our jobs are stressful and we just want to download and process the day. It serves as camaraderie and stress relief.” He also shared that one colleague dates a man with whom he (William) has a lot of common interests, so the three of them often meet up after work to socialize. Paul mentioned a gay friend who he was close to and spent a lot of time with outside of work. He went as far as co-signing a loan for this co-worker because he needed some additional financial assistance. In several instances like this one, the socializing after work led to deep and trusting friendships.

Rich shared a story where he was attending a district manager’s meeting and during a human resources presentation, the director stated that domestic partner benefits were added to the benefits package. In an example of doing outness, Rich said that he raised his hand and asked her to repeat her statement again so everyone heard it because he felt it was important as district managers were actively recruiting new employees to the company. The director restated the policy. Rich indicated that after the meeting “someone came up to me, one of our top producers, and pulled me aside and thanked me for saying what I said. She said
because ‘I take advantage of that.’” Through doing outness Rich met this lesbian and still socializes with her regularly.

The impact of networks and gay-on-gay interactions

These gay-on-gay interactions, coupled with the evidence of networks outside of work, is a strong indication that the larger gay-identified communities, through increased visibility and gay men’s connectivity to the communities, dramatically influence and impact the work lives of gay men. As more gay men and lesbians have come out in the last decade, and as the gay communities have become larger, it stands to reason that this phenomenon would have implications for the work place. Additionally, as the gay communities have become more interconnected with the advent of the internet, physical proximity is not the only way for gay men and lesbians use their identities to interact and network, allowing for even greater interaction. This stands in stark contrast to the findings of Woods in the late 1980s that gay men (though closeted) felt isolated within the workplace and were fearful of losing their jobs. While many social factors have likely contributed to a shift in workplace culture, clearly out gay men in this study, through doing outness, have experienced something significantly different than the men interviewed in Wood’s study just over a decade ago.

However, do these networks and close relationships among gay men in the workplace constitute anything like Rosabeth Moss Kanter’s (1977) concept of homosocial reproduction in the workplace? There is clear evidence of mentoring, as well as job referrals, among gay men. Evident in a few of the stories shared by respondents, individuals definitely assisted other gay men in finding and securing jobs up to and including gay men hiring other gay men.
Additionally, based on the socializing behaviors that most gay men referenced in their stories, informal communications during lunches and after hour activities suggest a pattern of individuals with like interests spending time together. Based on these observations, it might be logical to assume some level of homosocial reproduction is occurring among gay men in their workplaces, a product of doing outness. However, the missing piece of this argument is evidence that gay men, in fact, hold power within their organizations. While these men, in some cases, have significant job titles, and have received multiple promotions, there is no evidence the gay men in this study hold significant institutional power within their organizations or industries based on sexual orientation.

Perceptions of workplace policies: The results of doing outness

An interesting trend emerged among the respondents in this study. As mentioned earlier, more and more American corporations are adding sexual orientation to non-discrimination policies, along with adding domestic partnerships benefits. According to Raeburn (2004), gay rights groups and workplace activists have spent much time and energy in recent years on efforts to ensure non-discrimination and domestic partner benefits for gays and lesbians. However, in this study, while every respondent indicated such policies are important, only one respondent specifically tied his decision to work for (or not work for) a particular company to either of these gay-positive policies. The rest of the study participants did not base their decision on such policies.

For instance, Mark, a former minister who was asked to leave the church because of his sexual orientation, when asked if a non-discrimination policy protecting sexual
orientation played a role in his taking a position with a major retail company responded, "Not really. I went to work there not knowing whether they did or did not have such a policy." He went on to state that when filling out paper work he realized he could self-disclose his sexual orientation, which he chose to do. He further stated that "it is a completely comfortable place for me. I do not have to worry about in the sense of if they find out I am gay, that I am going to be fired or discriminated against." Having faced workplace discrimination in an earlier career, it may be surprising to some that Mark would take a new position without first investigating the company policies in regards to gays and lesbians.

Albert shared that he worked for his company long before non-discrimination policies began covering gays and lesbians, so when his company added gays and lesbians he was pleased, but by that time "it didn’t really matter to me." However, a few years ago his company was bought by another national company that does not include sexual orientation in its policy, and when asked if this concerned him, Albert’s response was, “No.” Similarly, when asked if the non-discrimination policy mattered when he was deciding whether or not to accept an offer with his current employer, Curt stated, “I didn’t even ask; it didn’t matter.” John responded that the fact his company does not have a non-discrimination policy protecting gay men and lesbians did not stop him from accepting the job. He indicated that "when I first went there I wasn’t concerned about whether they had the policy and then once I got settled I poked around a bit because I assumed they had the policy because it’s such a gay friendly place to work. One of our directors was out and very public and it was very much a non-issue."
The one respondent, Dennis, who cited that the non-discrimination policy did matter in advance of accepting his current position, did so based on unique circumstances. He previously worked for a state agency where the non-discrimination policy included sexual orientation but was later removed from the policy. In protest of the removal, but not as a result of actual discrimination, Dennis left his job. His story was covered in national newspapers. Despite others within the agency, including his supervisor, asking him not to leave, he felt he had to do so to make a stand about the change of policy. This case aside, the remainder of respondents—all of whom support such policies—did not cite gay-friendly workplace policies as even a minor force in shaping or determining their personal and professional decisions related to where to seek employment.

Why would the gay men in this study be so unconcerned about non-discrimination and domestic partnership policies? It appears, in the case of these respondents, their ability to do outness and navigate the workplace, often through networking and research conducted prior to accepting positions, gave them a level of comfort in the career moves they were making to a degree that they were unconcerned about policies. They had, in fact, done their homework on the work environments and attitudes, something that goes much deeper than a written policy, and were comfortable with their options before changing jobs. In addition, not all of the men in the study had domestic partners, and therefore several were not, at this time, concerned with such a policy. In every case where domestic partners existed, the partners had their own benefits from their employers. No one in the study currently had dependents, which would have implications for the need and desire for certain benefits. Regardless, doing outness cannot be downplayed as a specific force at play in how gay men
make workplace and career decisions, and in turn, how they navigate the workplace. It is
arguable that the ability to do outness has downplayed, at least for these men, the importance
of such policies. Additionally, as noted earlier, none of these men viewed themselves as
workplace activists.

In addition, many companies had gay-friendly reputations within the gay
communities, spread via word of mouth, but also via the actions of the companies. Curt, for
example, shared that his company sponsors the local gay pride festivities each year. When
asked why he thinks they choose to do so, he stated, “They see our community as a target
market.” Curt indicated his company sponsored gay pride despite complaints from some
customers. The company’s visibility within the gay community, according to Curt, adds to its
gay-friendly reputation. Paul also indicated his company is known within the community as
being gay-friendly, which made it easier for him to come out to himself and co-workers
during his tenure with the company. Paul’s company also sponsors gay-related events,
including gay pride festivals each year, and has made charitable contributions to several gay
and lesbian causes.

At the same time, many of the study participants went into their current jobs without
disclosing their sexual orientation in advance, and through doing outness slowly came out to
people within the workplace. The ability to do outness through displaying different identities
while at work, and not necessarily sharing one’s identity as a gay man before feeling
comfortable enough to do so, in some instances gave the men enough comfort to accept their
positions and worry about navigating the workplace after the fact. Additionally, several
respondents did outness to find other gay and lesbian people within the workplace with
whom they could develop networks and friendships and ease into a higher degree of outness at work. Tommy, for example, did so by using what he called “gay terms” such as “partner” and “significant other” when engaging in conversation with other individuals he suspected to be gay. He indicated that this tactic was effective in having individuals divulge their orientation, which Tommy did as well in return. He acknowledged that such language is often used in the gay communities to identify other gay and lesbian people. I would argue this is all a part of doing outness, in a manner that allows these gay men to navigate their workplaces at least partially on their own terms.

Finally, it should also be noted that several men in this study viewed their selection of a workplace not based on policies, but instead on the type of work they would be doing and the desire to have a meaningful career (self-fulfillment). For the majority of respondents this far outweighed any concern about gay-friendly policies within the workplace. Take for instance Rich’s response to how or if his sexual orientation held him back in the workplace. “No. I always get to where I want to go. I spot the place that I want to get to, lay out a plan. I set the goal, identify where I am, and map the plan and then do it.” This lends evidence that for some individuals their sexual orientation was not the driving force behind how they made career decisions, and that their gay-identities were not the only factor involved in their decision making process or that they viewed sexual orientation as a hindrance to success. This relates directly to Seidman’s (2000) point about the existence of primary and secondary identities. They view themselves as something more than simply a monolithic identity of “gay male”—being a gay man was simply one facet of their complex existence and therefore does not serve as the driving force behind their professional decisions, particularly gay-
positive workplace policies as part of their decision making process, which also suggests the invocation of other identities in determining their workplace choices as well as workplace behaviors. Most importantly, by doing outness it is feasible for these men to survive and thrive by using other identities in the complex process of navigating the workplace, despite their sexual orientation.

**Gay language: Camp, gender performance, and doing outness**

While it is evident from these data that out gay men do outness through work and social networks and utilize these networks to seek out employment opportunities deemed “safe” for gay men, and while it is evident that out gay men engage with one another within the workplace, another unique aspect of this engagement emerged during interviews with respondents in this study. Embedded in doing outness, gay men articulated examples of what I would term the use of “gay language” or code between and among gay men within the work setting and during specific moments of engagement. Several gay men in this study indicated that this gay language and campy behavior were unique to their circle of co-workers, colleagues and friends, and something that was not understood by (in fact, not comprehensible to) straight co-workers and colleagues. The special language or code words tied to camp were utilized by gay men in an effort to navigate the workplace in ways unknown to their straight co-workers and counterparts—covert activity if you will. Additionally, many gay men use this language in a way that allows them to form work cliques in a manner unique to the gay community—the opportunity to function within a sub-
community of a larger, dominant work culture. This was achieved through the display of gay identities, often stereotypical, when doing outness.

Take for instance John’s story of his workplace. He worked in a physical area within his office building where several gay men had adjoining office spaces. Shortly after he was hired by the company, John came out to these co-workers. Once he came out, John indicated that they started calling him “the princess.” This title was a way of initiating him into a larger group of gay men, which he referred to as a clique within the company. He stated:

When I first started there was the empress, the queen, the duchess, and so they dubbed me the princess. They even got me a little shirt that said, “Hello my name is princess.” We used to just go to lunch and joke around about our group. Then at one point there was the hand-maiden—when we invited someone new into our little subgroup.

John shared that this use of “campy” language, common within the gay community, went completely unnoticed by others in the company, and the small clique held it as an inside joke among themselves. It served as a way of communicating with one another while at work that was unknown, unrecognizable even, to others around them. It also served as a covert way of doing outness. Additionally, this example denoted a hierarchy, even among these men; John, the newcomer was deemed the princess—a lower status than the other three members of the groups—the duchess, queen, and empress. John added that “It is almost a secret language between gay men that straight people do not quite get—even the hippest of straight women. There is a code language, or whatever you want to call it, that takes place. That’s just what it is.” As individuals from the group left, and John himself transferred to another division with the company, the group dissolved. However, John shared that in his new division there is a group of gay men who have developed a similar chemistry, which he argues helps them cope
with everyday work stresses. Through this unique way of doing outness these gay men found a way to communicate secretly among themselves, separate from their straight counterparts in the company.

Curt mentioned a similar experience that happened to him within an office workgroup. He was assigned to a workgroup where three of the men were gay reporting to a gay man. He shared that it was just really interesting. The way we kidded each other and made fun of things in a way that you’d never think you would do in a company because you had always viewed the company as very heterosexual. I started looking at things differently. It was the most bizarre thing and we still talk about it today. They always made fun of me as being “the princess.” This meant the boss was going to give me all the awards and attention, and the rest were going to have to do all the work. We were just kidding around and enjoying the jokes. I think our straight counterparts were not privy and did not understand some of the conversations.

Curt indicated that most straight people around them never knew what was going on or were completely unaware of the inside jokes the workgroup shared. William also talked about his former retail career and how his gay co-workers always referred to themselves as “queens” and that the company joke among gay employees was that the company was often referred to as “young queers” or “young queens,” a play on the company’s actual name.

Daryl shared a slightly different experience when working within a group of other gay men with a former employer. Daryl indicated he was more comfortable working with other gay men because “you can have a different level of conversation. I think when you are talking to straight people you are negotiating conversation levels and I think that we can, you know, have certain expectations around how we speak to each other.” In essence, Daryl was pointing out that doing outness with straight people was vastly different than when doing it with other gay men. He went on to state that
we have the same language, we know the same language. We know more of where the boundaries are. You know that the conversation may/can change... it is okay if it turns to something sexual, for the most part, you can test the waters much further out on the edges. You can talk about things like sex or going out to a bar. I know I can talk about whatever. Whereas with a straight person, man or woman, you do not know where that might go. We have a strong subculture, and as a group can talk to each other.

Daryl’s belief that there is a different language gay men speak (compared to heterosexuals) was evident in others’ stories as well, including those of Curt and John. The language they speak of is intrinsically tied to gay identities and to doing outness. Through negotiating their gay identities in the workplace, these men were able to participate in moments of engagement that were unique to them and provided a certain degree of comfort or connection to the larger gay communities while functioning in a presumed heterosexual environment of the workplace. The use of a gay language and camp provided an ability to have conversations that are typically considered taboo within the context of a workplace. They were directly tied to the life experiences of these gay men within the larger gay communities as well as the presumed culturally acceptable language and topics among gay men. These nuances are tied to gay identities, both stereotypical—through the use of campy terminology—and rooted in real-life experience that is drawn upon during these workplace moments of engagement with other gay men, all of which is part of doing outness.

Why is camp an important dimension in how these men interact with one another?

Daniel Harris ties the use of camp, in part, to what sets us apart from all other minorities is that we have neither a geographical place of origin, nor physical characteristics. We are, by definition, an utterly nondescript diaspora, dispersed through every social class and region of the country, a hidden fraternity united solely by something as subjective as our erotic fantasies. Because we are the only invisible minority, we must invent from scratch those missing physical features that enable us to spot our imperceptible compatriots, who
would remain unseen and anonymous if they did not prominently display on their own bodies, in their sibilant voices and shuffling gaits, in their immaculate grooming and debonair style of deportment, the caste mark that constitutes the essence of gay sensibility. As yet if these subtle understated signs and telltale gestures are to unite us without subjecting us to the humiliation of exposure, they must remain indiscernible to those from whom they are not intended, the masses of heterosexuals who are deaf to their silent appeal. (Harris 1997, 35)

Given that these men felt the need to maintain a covert nature to their interactions, at least leads one to believe they were not fully comfortable explaining or using gay language around their straight counterparts. At the same time, these interactions allowed the gay men to do outness and feel connected within the workplace to their own sub-community tied to their gay identities. Paula Graham (1995) argues that camp expresses the relation of gay men to male authority, mediated by a relationship to representations of the feminine. Stephen Maddison adds that “camp practices structure representational negotiations gay men make with the feminine, political interventions that have resistant or transgressive effects in terms of the conditions through which gay male identities are experienced as problematic” (Maddison 2000, 90). This implies that the workplace continues to be heterosexualized in a manner that gay men are still mindful of what is and is not tolerated as part of the workplace culture. As discussed in the previous chapter, gay men were conscious about the boundaries within which they had to navigate the workplace relative to their dimensions of outness and the various identities they used when doing outness with co-workers, subordinates, and supervisors. The use of this unique language and camp behavior may in part be a survival tactic or an actual act of defiance that does, in the words of one respondent, “make the work day more manageable and fun for us.” Therefore, the use of this language as part of doing
outness is at once potentially a result of discomfort and pressure from the dominant culture, as well as an act of transgression and defiance of that dominant culture.

Another interesting aspect of these stories is the way gender is played out in these workplace sub-communities. In the case of Curt, William, and John’s stories, the use of feminine identities, language, and characteristics were prevalent. This stands in stark contrast with the stories shared in Chapter 3 relative to how out gay men—including these same men—developed their dimensions of outness to co-workers and supervisors, often in a matter-of-fact manner invoking a sense of normalcy when discussing their lives (especially when discussing partners). This existence of two worlds, or cultures, within the workplace demonstrates that gay men call upon various identities depending on the social context in which they find themselves when doing outness, and use this as a means of navigating their work environments.

As mentioned earlier, West and Zimmerman in discussing doing gender stated that if done appropriately "we simultaneously sustain, reproduce, and render legitimate the institutional arrangements that are based on sex category. If we fail to do gender appropriately, we as individuals—not the institutional arrangements—may be called to account" (West and Zimmerman 1987, 146). Unique to the stories of several gay men in this study is the reality that they failed to do gender appropriately—at least based on the dominant cultures expectations—while interacting with other gay colleagues. However, when interacting with the dominant culture, they did do gender appropriately. This provides further evidence that out gay men call upon different identities, including multiple gay identities, within the workplace setting based on the situations in which they find themselves, and
further establishes the nuanced differences between doing gender and doing outness. As Peter Nardi reminds us, “just as it is with anyone in our culture, gay men carry out gender in multiple ways depending on differences related to social and psychological characteristics, contexts, and eras” (Nardi 2000, 7).

At the same time, the use of feminine terminology, such as queen, princess, and other feminized words within the gay male workplace networks demonstrates a difference from the dominant cultural expectations related to gender, and suggests that gay men do not have one ideal concept of doing gender or gender expectations, which stands in stark contrast to how heterosexual men might do gender, particularly in the workplace. I believe this is tied to the unique ability of gay men to do outness and through this process they have learned new ways in which to manage identities. In the stories of the out gay men in this study, evidence exists that gay men have an ability to navigate both the dominant culture as well as their own gay sub-cultures within the workplace structures. This ability to navigate two different cultures will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5, but is important to mention now in the context of how gay men interact with one another. Clearly gay men’s interactions with one another are unique and vastly contrast with how they interact with others in the workplace.

**Sexual double standard revisited**

Take Daryl’s story of his interactions with gay co-workers. He mentions the discussions of otherwise taboo subjects such as sex with his gay co-workers as a regular occurrence. Additionally both Daryl and John openly discussed sexual exploits with gay co-workers, claiming that these relationships did not harm their working interactions with one
another, but rather strengthened them. In fact, Daryl shared that his ex-lover helped him get a new position within a new company, and acknowledged that other gay co-workers had sexual relationships with one another and maintained friendships after the fact. These behaviors and interactions, however, were common knowledge among the gay men in the company and part of doing outness with other gays. However, these behaviors and interactions were hidden from the dominant work culture. Tommy indicated that he met his current partner of twenty years during his first week on the job when they accidentally were locked in a room together. While they dated and eventually moved in together, it was not until years later, after they were living the lives of a married couple, that they both came out to co-workers and others became aware of their relationship. The intimate details of the lives of out gay men in this study, for the most part, were shared openly among gay co-workers, but kept more subdued or in some cases completely hidden from heterosexuals in the workplace.

This provides further support of Seidman’s (2002) idea of the bad citizen; while it is acceptable to discuss one’s personal life provided it adheres to the dominant culture’s definition of normal, open discussion of sexual exploits would not fall into the normal behavior category, but rather the bad citizen category, and therefore out gay men are more reluctant to discuss these topics with their dominant culture colleagues in the workplace. At the same time, it also suggests that out gay men, because of the comfort level of discussing these otherwise taboo subjects with one another, likely adhere to, or are open to, other definitions of normal. This means they do outness differently depending on whether they are interacting with gay or straight colleagues. It also suggests that expectations for doing
outness varies depending on the sexual orientation of those with whom the interactions are occurring.

To a lesser degree this also suggests that the sexual double standard, which Woods (1993) discussed at length, is still in existence, albeit in an altered form since his study more than a decade ago. Woods argued that gay men in his study viewed the workplace as asexual, a place where sexuality was not and should not be displayed. However, the contradiction to this is that heterosexuality is pervasive in the workplace. As Barbara Gutek stated:

Sexual pursuits and conquests, jokes and innuendos can be subsumed under the stereotype of the organizational man—goal oriented, rational, competitive and assertive, which are expected and recognized as male traits. Men may make sexual overtures in an assertive, competitive manner. Likewise, sexual jokes, metaphors and innuendos may be seen as part of competitive male horseplay. Thus the traits of competitiveness, assertiveness, and power-orientation are noticed, whereas the sexual component is not. (Gutek 1989, 62)

Additionally, Woods states that “nowhere is heterosexual values more deeply embedded than in what may be our single most conspicuous social institution: the family. When a man speaks of his wife in a professional setting, others interpret this as a statement about his social role, not his sexual performance” (Woods 1993, 59). In his study, gay men felt they could not talk about their personal lives because such discussion did not belong in the workplace, despite the fact it was and is pervasive. In my own study, through a unique way of doing outness, out gay men were quite comfortable talking about their personal lives with straight colleagues, but primarily the traditional parts of their lives such as monogamous partners and their home lives. They were not at all comfortable talking about their sexual exploits beyond their own gay networks in the workplace, which contradicts Gutek’s assertion that men can and do discuss and enact these behaviors in the context of the
workplace—at least not these gay men. Therefore, aspects of the sexual double-standard Woods discussed over a decade ago are still in existence today for gay men. However, some progress has been made, notably the fact that gay men in this study could, for the most part, be out and discuss certain acceptable aspects of their lives while at work. I would argue this progress, albeit small, is tied to doing outness, and through this process more gays are out in the workplace.

**Summary**

This chapter makes the case for the importance of moments of engagement with gayness—those interactions between gay men within the context of their work lives. Evidence was offered to demonstrate the important role of doing outness in developing networks—informal, formal, and referral system—among gay men at work and in other social institutions such as the larger gay communities. These networks are often tapped to assist in determining when or where gay men will choose to make career changes. Once inside the workplace, gay men also develop social networks and mentoring relationships with other gay men, an important way of doing outness, which enhances their work experiences and often assists in career advancement. These relationships are often developed through one-on-one interactions.

This chapter also examined the unique way gay men do outness in the workplace, relative to the use of camp and a unique language among themselves. Evidence exists that suggests gay men do outness differently when interacting with one another. Additionally, this research advances a theory that gay men are still disadvantageously positioned among
their dominant culture peers in the workplace. This was apparent in the starkly different ways they do gender among themselves compared to their heterosexual counterparts, and their practice of hiding certain elements of their gay lives from their heterosexual peers, which further supports the existence of a persistent sexual double standard in the workplace.
CHAPTER 5: ENGAGING HETEROSEXUALITY

While looking at how out gay men interact and engage with other gay men and lesbians in the workplace has proven to be an important component of analyzing how gay men are doing outness to navigate the workplace, the vast majority of interactions—moments of engagement—that out gay men experience in the workplace are with heterosexual men and women. Therefore, exploring and analyzing how these moments of engagement impact the workplace navigation is critical to understanding out gay men’s experiences in the workplace. This chapter focuses on gay men’s interactions and experiences with heterosexual women, heterosexual men, and also masculinity in general, given its embeddedness in workplace culture.

**Gay men and straight women: Doing outness to form working relationships**

In exploring how gay men do outness with straight women in the workplace, the men in this study demonstrated a wide range of interactions, feelings, and motivations in how and when they engage straight women; yet some trends emerged. Gary expressed a preference for working with and for women. He stated:

> I relate to my female bosses easier because, in the back of my mind, I think there is a connection to being a minority, the female minority and the gay minority. There is some sort of bond there. The male bosses I have had, I could not deal with at all. It is interesting, but from the standpoint of bosses, the ones I have gotten along with best have been women.

Gary continued by sharing that he is more comfortable around women and that they seem to be very comfortable with him as well. He shared a recent interaction with a female colleague, whom he did not yet know well.
I was with this woman who runs one of our divisions, and she was doing a presentation. Now, I don't yet have a strong relationship with her and have not dealt with her a lot. She is trying to get an earring in her ear and she cannot find the earring hole and is getting frustrated. She says, "I cannot find the hole" and I bend over to her and I take my finger and stick it right where the hole is and say, "The hole is right here" and she started busting out laughing and suddenly she was my best friend. Before that we didn't really talk much, but afterward she calls me often and that day she and I just sat down and had an hour long conversation about things going on in our lives.

Gary acknowledges it was a bit unusual to physically touch a female co-worker whom he didn’t know well, but, as a gay man, he felt he has a bit more latitude to do so. Gary was doing outness in his interaction with this particular female co-worker through the use of his gay identity. Gary indicated this was not usual and acknowledged a leeway afforded him by women because he is gay and his interactions are not perceived as sexual advances.

John similarly shared that while he prefers socializing with gay men at work, women are his definite second choice. He shared that "you gravitate to the familiar" arguing that he has more in common with straight women than he does with straight men. By familiar, John explained that based on life experiences as a gay man, he felt he could better understand women's life experiences, primarily because he has had significant social contact with women, but also because of their perceived second-class status to heterosexual men. As a gay man, John could relate to the social pressures of gay men being something "less than" straight men. John also mentioned that most of his co-workers and supervisors have been and continue to be women. He indicated that his work culture is not necessarily traditional.

When asked to further explain what he meant by that, he stated:

It is a different culture. It is a less masculine culture. I think that when we have meetings, for example, things get talked about, people really like to talk through everything. It is not a top-down structure. It is more about consensus and collaboration. Our unit is much more collaborative and you communicate much more
than you do in other divisions which are more dominated by men. You have to be comfortable with talking about things. Sometimes you end up talking things to death, and sometimes I prefer there to be direct decisions. But I do think there are styles that are more feminine and styles that are more masculine.

Despite occasional frustrations, John definitely preferred the "feminine" work approach which he spoke about at length, which tied to his preference for working and socializing with women at work. John’s stories point to an opportunity for him to advance in the workplace—a perceived advantage to being gay and being able to relate well to women. In relating to these female co-workers and supervisors, John is demonstrating his ability to do outness by calling upon past social interactions with other women and being able to relate to women based on a perceived bond as a minority group. In addition, because his female co-workers displayed gay-positive attitudes, he was able to establish his dimensions of outness early in his tenure.

Paul spoke of socializing with his management team, which was predominantly female, and described it as a tight knit group. He shared that they socialize after work, sometimes just "going out for a beer." Paul also indicated that when he was closeted at work he preferred working and socializing with women because he was more comfortable, and felt safer, around women. In these examples, Paul is calling upon past experiences of uncomfortable interactions with heterosexual men and contrasting them with his more positive interactions with women. Since coming out, he is comfortable with both men and women, gay or straight, but still spends more social time with women, gravitating to the familiar, much like John.
Mark also shared that it is easier for him to interact with women than straight men, indicating that with straight men “there is sometimes a hesitation about what to talk about.”

Mark argued that women are different than straight men.

My experience has been that they are different, because I do not think women are threatened by gay men. It terms of casual friendship or a work relationship, I do not think a man’s sexuality has much impact on a woman unless it is somebody she wants to date. If it is me sitting around a break table eating lunch, the topics we talk about could be just about anything and I do not think they are going to be shocked which is different than straight men where it can be a little more difficult.

Mark is demonstrating an ability to interact with women and talk about topics that would not likely be discussed in the presence of straight men, further pointing to a unique relationship between gay men and women. This is also an effective way of doing outness; in the case of Mark, just being “one of the girls” through the ability to have similar conversations with women that they would have with one another. Relatedly, Mark also stated that it is much easier for him to “break the ice” with women than straight men in the workplace, because he simply starts conversations with them more freely.

Curt ranks straight women second only to gay men as his favorite group of people to network and socialize with at work. He states that he “thinks gay men get along better with females.” When asked why he felt that way, Curt elaborated that “it’s a personal thing, I think we connect with women easily and feel comfortable and at ease with women.” Curt said that as he observes other gay men in his company he sees a lot of them socializing and networking with straight women. Curt again points to doing outness in a way that forms social bonds with women because he and others are gay—a way of positioning one’s sexual orientation—and dimensions of outness—to form strong social relationships with women in the workplace.
Not all gay men feel the same way about women

While many men in the study expressed a preference or certain comfort level working and socializing with women, not all men felt this way. In fact, several men felt more comfortable working with other men, including straight men, which will be discussed in greater length in a later section of this chapter. Ken, for instance, stated that he preferred working with men because “men tend to be more direct and less ‘catty.’” I think women feel that way too—a lot of women prefer to work for men for the same reasons.” Additionally, he shared a recent conversation he had with a male co-worker where they discussed that “women physicians can be difficult to deal with, they have a different work ethic.”

However, it is noteworthy that a distinct age difference was evident in the differences in preferences among study respondents. Older men, by and large, were less comfortable with women and preferred socializing with other men, than the younger men in this study. Ken, for example, was the second oldest man in this study. His opinions about working with women are rooted primarily in outdated—though still often invoked—stereotypes. Younger men had stronger preferences for interacting with women over straight men and appeared to be more effective in doing outness when interacting with women (compared to the older men). Some of this can inevitably be tied to the reality that older men in the study started their professional careers in work environments dominated by men (and sometimes only men) and had to learn to work in such an environment, compared to more contemporary environments where professional women are much more prevalent in workplace cultures.

The role of embedded masculine behaviors and expectations, which have changed over time,
is also a likely cause of this distinction (and will be discussed in greater length later in this chapter).

**Gay men and straight women: Doing outness for corporate advantage**

Beyond the preference most men in this study had for socializing and working with straight women over straight men, a few men in the study took their relationships with straight women even further. Some men, for instance, used their interaction with straight women to leverage their interactions with straight men and others within the organizations. Albert, who stated he is more comfortable socializing with men, gained valuable information from women. Albert often socializes with women because, “they are bit less likely to talk about the technical or strictly job and task oriented things. Women are a little more likely to talk about why somebody did this or that or who was mad at who, or who is not getting along.” When asked why he liked being part of such conversations, Albert replied, “I can see where there is an advantage for me. Knowing this information allows me to understand how to navigate through this workplace.” The knowledge of office gossip, to Albert, was beneficial in interacting with other co-workers, male and female.

Similarly Curt uses his interactions with straight women to better position himself with men in the organization. While he prefers socializing with women, Curt understands that in his workplace culture there are many instances where he must interact with men. Curt shared that he is not usually comfortable talking with straight men and that he typically cannot relate to their conversations. He said:

Maybe it’s my own little hang ups, but I feel like a lot of the straight male conversations, casual conversations, are about sports, which I know nothing about.
But, I talk to my straight female friend from Alabama, she likes football, so she talks to me a lot about it. So, if I have had a recent conversation with her, I'll feel much more comfortable talking to the straight men at the water cooler about football.

In this instance, Curt is directly borrowing from his conversations with a straight woman and using the information as a means to generate conversation with straight men in an effort to fit in with straight male co-workers. Curt is doing outness with women and forming relationships with them—as discussed earlier in this chapter—only to turn around and do outness differently with the men in his office. By positioning himself this way in the conversations with straight men, Curt is either calling upon a more traditional male identity in an effort to appear as straight (closeted on the degree of outness continuum) or to cast himself as a gay man who is “not that different” than the straight men with whom he is doing outness. His sexual orientation is ever-present, even if behind the scenes, in all of these interactions. Curt is doing outness in both situations, albeit presenting himself, and his sexual orientation, differently depending on with whom he is interacting—straight men or women.

Tommy states that such actions are a waste of his time and that he makes no effort to have conversations with straight men about sports or other activities that they typically discuss. However, Tommy does argue that he has used his interactions and connections with women to advance himself professionally in the workplace. For instance:

As we as gay men navigate our way up maybe what we are doing and how we do it is the same thing that we are critical of straight white men have been doing. It certainly has served them well and so I think that is how women are doing it and so I would guess we are probably doing it in very much the same fashion that worked for men for ages. It is just now the rules have changed and now it is wrong for straight men to do it, but it is okay for us to do it. Some of the things we do are probably no different than what men have been doing, and maybe that is why I have been able to advance. Because I have reported mostly to women, and I have been able to connect with them.
I have been able to “play the game” in a much more effective way with women than I ever could have with straight men.

What Tommy is referring to is a different form of homosocial reproduction, one in which gay men and straight women, because of perceived common interests have bonded in a way that he insinuates has helped him advance professionally. Tommy is intentionally doing outness in these circumstances, playing upon his sexual orientation, to interact with female supervisors in an effort to advance professionally. He directly attributes his close relationships with female bosses as a means for him to move up the corporate ladder. Others in the study, including John and Curt, also implied that close working relationships with women, specifically female supervisors, have assisted them with their professional advancement, but mainly because these women related to them as gay men first and foremost.

These are all examples of gay white men in this study doing outness in their interactions with women in a way that provided them with workplaces advantage. Often, how they interacted with straight men was the result of information learned during their interactions with straight women. Additionally, these men worked in environments where women held positions of power, often supervisory roles over the gay men in the study, thus allowing them to engage with these women in a way that provided space for them to thrive in the workplace as out gay men. In situations where these women were self-identified as gay-friendly, the gay men in this study were able to effectively do outness and play upon their sexual orientation in a way that distinguished them from straight men and, in turn, allowed them to get close to these female co-workers and supervisors.
Gay men and straight men: The difficulty of doing outness

While the majority of respondents preferred to socialize and work with women over straight men, the reality is that all men in this study still had to interact with straight men in the workplace. Further analysis of how these interactions occurred shows that the gay men in this study group found very different, in fact rather diverse, ways of interacting with straight men in their workplaces. Their stories—and how they chose to do outness—demonstrated examples of friendships, networks, mentoring opportunities, male bonding experiences, and efforts to at least identify common ground, or like interests, with straight men as a means of connecting with these men in the work environment.

While several men acknowledged that finding common ground with straight men is not always easy, efforts to do so are still made on a regular basis. Daryl, for example, said that typically at work lunches and other social settings he sticks to discussions of work with straight men, but when the topics veer away from work “you get into that purely social aspect when you make the decision not to talk about work. You have to figure out how to talk, what you are going to talk about, where does the conversation go? There is not common road that we can always find.” He admits that identifying topics of casual conversation are “much harder to find” with straight men and if you cannot identify them easily, you end up negotiating about what commonalities you might have. John agrees that “in a social arena, in terms of what we do outside of work, we have much less in common.” But he admits that how you interact with co-workers is often “influenced by what you do outside of work.” John continues by stating, based on his experience, straight men he has worked with typically talk about “sports and children, and I do not talk about either—those are not things that are
common for me.” Other men acknowledged similar difficulties in their everyday interactions with straight men. All of these examples pointed to the reality that sexual orientation, coupled with gender, led to difficulties in gay men in this study connecting socially with straight men. While this was an underlying theme throughout these men’s stories, many of them eventually found ways to connect, through unique ways of doing outness, and bridged the apparent divide between gay and straight.

*Gay men and straight men: Mentoring relationships*

Despite this social disconnect, several men in the study talked at length about mentoring relationships they had with straight men. Despite his usual challenges of connecting with straight men, Daryl mentioned an exception that occurred when a former employer had an informal mentor program in which he chose to participate. He stated that “my boss and I had a very good relationship, and he became a mentor of sorts when I was there. He went to a different department, and I stayed in the same department where my path continued and I got promoted a couple of times. I continued to use my old boss as my mentor, and I became much more effective.” This boss happened to be a straight man. Daryl acknowledges that while the relationship began as strictly professional, over time he and his former boss developed a social relationship as well.

I have been to his house; I know his wife; I have met his kids. I have always been openly gay to him and he and I have discussed that this is why we were able to have this type of relationship, this mentorship. Because he knew who I was. He also knew my partner at the time and he knew when we broke up, and he ended up knowing a lot about me personally. That allowed him to get a fuller picture of who I was professionally and personally and he knew about my strengths and weaknesses because they are not all based in business knowledge, they are based in personality, they are often based in the way you interact and act with people.
Daryl fully acknowledged that this particular straight man took care of him while he was employed for this company. However, Daryl also admits this straight man was gay-friendly and when Daryl came out to him early in their relationship, he immediately showed an interest in Daryl’s life. This made doing outness with this particular supervisor significantly more easy, as Daryl did not have to spend a lot of time determining how to effectively divulge his orientation, establishing a targeted dimension of outness.

Despite Curt’s stated preference for working and socializing with women over straight men, he also shared an example of having a mentoring relationship with a former straight male supervisor. He shared that “he and I still have a relationship and I look to him for advice and still meet him sometimes after work, at lunch, after hours; we have a very friendly relationship. I look for him to help me out and give advice.” Curt admits the relationship is friendlier now than when this man was his supervisor. He values his expertise and advice, which has helped Curt advance within the company. Again, Curt admitted that this supervisor demonstrated a gay-friendly attitude early in their work relationship, even though he didn’t take an active interest in Curt’s life until after their reporting lines changed. Regardless, their relationship developed in part because Curt could be out and open about his orientation nearly from the beginning of their work interactions.

During his career, Ben has moved around several times, but most recently returned to a company for which he had worked previously. In a role reversal, he found himself reporting to two straight men who once reported to him (before he was out of the closet). These two men, Martin and Bob, were very protective of Ben. Ben shared that he was having
some personal problems that could have easily jeopardized his job, but Martin and Bob requested that Ben be moved to their team in an effort to help him. Ben revealed:

They said, “Ben you have issues, deal with them.” If I were to really put it the way I think it happened, Martin and Bob effectively rescued me and they spent a fair amount of corporate capital— influence capital—to get me on their team in order to kind of slap me around a little bit and get me straightened out.

This “tough love,” Ben acknowledges, saved him from losing his job. When asked why they would look out for him in this way, Ben indicated that when Martin reported to him years ago, Ben did something similar for him during a period when Martin was not performing well in his job. Ben recalled that “I tried to coach him into being a much better asset and it worked really well. He’s told me that he owes everything to me.” According to Ben this reciprocal mentoring relationship was never jeopardized because of his sexual orientation, stating that when he told Martin he way gay, the response was “big deal.” In this situation, Ben established his relationship with Martin as a straight man several years earlier, and now as an out gay man, the way in which they interacted with one another had not changed much from their first interactions years earlier. Ben suggested it was “just like old times” with the exception that the supervisory roles were reversed. It is quite feasible that Martin’s concept of Ben was so deeply established that once Ben established his dimensions of outness with Martin, presenting it in a way that demonstrated he was the same guy he knew years earlier, Martin’s reaction to Ben’s orientation was nearly non-existent.

John, who also struggles with maintaining social relationships with straight male co-workers, was assigned to mentor a new straight male employee as part of his company’s formal mentor program. He admits that “I got so excited when I met Ray. Even he knew I was celebrating that I had a straight male friend to run around with.” Ray was the only
straight man in John’s division at the time, and he had to travel with John frequently, a
program they called shadowing. John acknowledged that traveling with Ray forced the two
of them to get to know each other, and he was surprised by what he found. John stated that
Ray “is not your average straight male” because

he is from Bellingham, Washington, which is probably the most liberal city in
Washington. He referred to the woman he lives with now as his partner, they are not
married, but they have been together for ten years. He calls her his partner, so I think
that Rich is an out-there guy anyway.

The use of gay-friendly language, such as “partner,” signaled to John that this straight man
was “not like all the rest.” While it was an overall positive experience for John, and he was
excited to have a straight male colleague that he could relate to, he still remained skeptical
about straight male co-workers in general. However, in interacting with Ray, John was able
to let his guard down and was doing outness in a similar manner to how he interacted with
female co-workers, openly discussing his private life with Ray.

Throughout these examples and stories of the gay men who were not as comfortable
interacting with straight male counterparts, many exceptions were shared. However, the fact
that some of their trepidations were rooted in stereotypes attributed to straight men was never
acknowledged by the respondents. That said, it was evident that gay men were far less
comfortable doing outness with straight men than with women and other gays and lesbians,
mainly because of the perceived different life experiences with straight men. Nonetheless,
the mentoring relationships shared above do demonstrate, albeit in a different manner, the
potential for homosocial reproduction occurring between gay and straight men in the context
of the workplace. The informal (and formal) mentorship of the gay men in these examples
points to at least some capacity for validating Kanter’s (1977) idea of homosocial
reproduction in the workplace. After all, several of the men advanced professionally as a result of these mentor arrangements. The distinction offered in these stories is that the straight men met the gay men on their own terms, and gay men were allowed to do outness in an honest manner. The straight men in these stories were receptive to relationships with these gay men, because they were highly accepting of their sexual orientation and did not rely on the traditional means of social activity to develop these relationships, such as the golf course, country club, and other all-male domains. For the most part these relationships contained personal substance and substantial soul-baring activities on the part of those involved, allowing the gay men the freedom in these relationships to do outness on their own terms.

Kerfoot and Knights (1996) argue that managerial styles have changed over time, and because masculinity is fluid and always changing, the “new-wave” management styles embody and embrace flexibility, social skills, and interpersonal interaction with employees. Despite the fact that social skills are typically tied to the feminine, they posit that men will continue to hold the powerful management positions. They also argue that men will use social skills as an enactment or facade to gain favor with employees. However, it is difficult to argue that this is what is occurring in the relationships between the gay and straight men in this study, particularly because in several cases, such as Curt and Daryl, the mentoring relationships continued beyond the supervisor-subordinate relationship, and in the case of Ben, the supervisors took the risk of bringing Ben onto their team, implying these arrangements go beyond management relationships. This still leaves room for interpretation as to what is occurring in these gay-straight male work relationships. Looking at other gay-
straight male relationships could shed further light on how the interactions between these two groups facilitate how gay men navigate their workplace.

Nevertheless, the fact still remains that, gay or straight, the individuals involved in these mentoring relationships are male. Gender does still matter. According to Williams, “The patterns of social bonding in high-status jobs remain distinctly masculine. Professional success often means being ‘one of the boys.’ Studies of the glass ceiling stress the ways mentoring are linked with what theorists call masculine gender performance—behaving in the ways traditionally expected of men” (Williams 2000, 68). While a few exceptions exist, most gay white men in this study cited examples of fitting in through the invocation of straight identities melded with their gay identities in a way that created sameness between gay and straight (to be discussed in greater length later in this chapter).

Gay men and straight men: Male bonding and other relationships

Dennis is far more comfortable socializing at work with gay men and women than he is with straight men. However, Dennis does have social relationships with straight men in his company. These relationships are predominantly formed at the gym. Dennis stated that “a lot of my socializing with straight men comes at the gym because I go running every day there are a lot of straight men who at are the gym, many of which are runners also.” In Dennis’ example, the gym serves as a place or location where male bonding is occurring between co-workers, due in part because it is predominantly men who are utilizing the facility when Dennis is present. While most of these men are straight, Dennis, as a gay man, has found value in using the gym as a place to socialize and find common ground with
straight male co-workers. Dennis has been able to use his athleticism as a means of finding
common ground with these co-workers, despite their knowledge of him being gay. Through
doing outness, by being out coupled with using the identity of “jock” or “athlete,” Dennis has
formed collaborative and mutually respectful relationships with these co-workers. He is, in
essence, one of them—a fit, athletic, male co-worker who happens to be gay.

William also discussed stories of male bonding in his workplace. Most of his co-
workers, also managers in similar positions to his, are women. However, his supervisor is a
straight man. William acknowledges that he and his supervisor have a good social
relationship where they can discuss just about anything. He shared that

he talks about his partner, a female partner. They’ve been together for quite some
time. He asks about my partner and what we did over the weekend. He’s been to my
house. I’ve been over to his house. He brings up family issues, like his cousin who
was recently in the hospital, and his mother.

While their relationship displays social elements, it goes beyond that. William indicated that
the female managers get along just fine with his supervisors, but “I am the only one that he
would call a friend.” William continues by stating:

He takes care of me, and basically I am the first person he comes to if he needs
something. So, as far as confidants, we pretty much rely on each other and I basically
go to him rather than going to my co-workers. Since we are so close, I use him more,
a far as when it comes to bouncing ideas off of him. We watch out for each other.
For example, the managers in my office do not know how to take him. Today he was
on edge and I was basically warning them (the co-workers) and warded them off. I
told them, “You don’t want to go around him today because he’s in a bad mood.” I
was helping him by keeping everyone out of his hair.

When asked if the fact that they are both men, the only two men in the division, had anything
to do with the unique relationship they share, William responded, “I would say that has a lot
to do with it. And, I do not go to him with whiny things that the other people do. I basically
self-manage and am able to make decisions. Others go to him and question themselves.”

The office dynamics which puts them in an atmosphere of being the only two men has generated a fair amount of male bonding between William and his straight supervisor, up to and including what has developed into a close friendship. This appears to be a great benefit to William over his colleagues, given the relationship he has with his supervisor, which clearly provides him with additional knowledge and information about how to work best with this particular supervisor. William is doing outness by presenting his orientation in a matter-of-fact manner but accentuating loyalty to his supervisor rooted in a male-bonding practice. They have cast themselves as the “other” up against a team of women. This “otherness” downplays sexual orientation but highlights gender.

These stories demonstrate the ability for gay men and straight men to form friendships and practice male bonding within the workplace primarily through downplaying sexual orientation and accentuating other commonalities—a unique, but effective way of doing outness. One might also argue many of the relationships demonstrated above are exceptions, not the norm, and perhaps more than a bit non-traditional. However, these relationships are an emerging trend. Fee (2000) argues that gay men’s friendships with one another are more similar to those that women maintain among themselves than those of straight men. He states, “There is obvious reason to think that gay men’s friendships more easily bypass the remoteness and relatively anxious quality that accompanies men’s friendships more broadly.” These relationships have a “disproportionate amount of disclosure, sharing, and emotional connection” (Fee 2000, 47). Fee’s research established a contrast between gay and straight friendship patterns. However, these friendships between gay and straight men exist
nonetheless. Much like the stories of men like Daryl and John when they referenced a difficulty in finding common ground with straight men, Fee found that “there were limits to the degree to which they, as gay men, could fit into all significant aspects of their straight friends’ lives.” I would argue that doing outness played at least some role in these relationships developing in the first place. That said, Fee also posits that growing research shows that although gay men share some dilemmas of straight masculinity in friendship, they are more likely to be multifaceted and variable in their embodiments of gender and thus in the way the instrumental-intimacy discourse is actualized in tangible relationships. It is little wonder why many straight men are now finding gay men to be resources in addressing the limitations and costs of normative heterosexual masculinity. (Fee 2000, 58)

Evident in the stories of gay men from this study, when friendships were able to form, something other than just a friendship tied to instrumentality or intimacy is occurring between gay men and straight men in the workplace. It is not necessarily one or the other and often is predicated on both instrumentality and intimacy. Additionally, I argue that this “multifaceted ability in their embodiments of gender” is only part of the equation. The other part is the process of doing outness; the effective means of presenting oneself in a controlled and pre-conceived manner rooted in life experience and the ability to call upon specific identities or scripts coupled with how one presents one’s sexual orientation (dimensions of outness) that assists in the formation of these male-on-male friendships which bridge the gay-straight divide.

Fee (2000) argues there is a transformative power in the fact that friendships for gay men, tied to intimacy, and friendships for straight men, tied to instrumentality, are melded together when the two collide.
There is a realization that shifts in straight-gay relationships between men can be configured within long-standing but intensifying instabilities around masculinity, sexuality, and identity and intersections among them—a development that is affecting the ostensibly unmarked legacy of heterosexual masculinity. We have seen that gay life, as an oppositional and diversified experience, does not exist in isolation from heteronormative meanings and practices. Although gay must play off the hegemony of straight, research has shown that heterosexuality must fend off threats to its own unity and continuity by appealing to contrast with gayness. Therefore gay-straight relationships, long predicated on a discourse of exclusion and peculiarity so as not even to be construed as a relationship, can be used—indeed, reflexively performed—in ways that reveal the fictional quality of the division between the groups and meanings that sustain it. (Fee 2000, 60)

Fee is absolutely correct in acknowledging that gay life provides diversified experience, often cited by men in my study, and that it does not exist in isolation from heteronormative meanings and practices, mainly because gay men call upon these meanings and practices as part of doing outness. The blending of these divergent life experiences as gay men, the identities and scripts from which they can draw upon (particularly leading up to coming out), is at the root of successfully doing outness. This strategy has worked for the men in my study. In doing outness, they have used their diverse experiences to their advantage while meshing and interweaving these experiences with normative practices to ensure a non-reaction or positive reaction to their revelation of sexual orientation.

While Fee’s theory that these relationships are transformative may well hold true, the relationships—friendships, mentorships, or otherwise—described by gay men in this study would at least imply a reciprocal benefit for both the gay and straight men. Gay men in this study often talked about the benefits, or instrumentality, these relationships brought to them within the context of the workplace, while they offered to the straight men the benefit of intimacy that they might otherwise not be experiencing in other friendships with straight men. Evident in how these friendships and mentorships took form—that homosocial reproduction
occurred, in part, on the gay men's terms—mutual benefits were certainly occurring for both men to continue these friendships and mentorships even beyond their perceived instrumentality. This points to the very success of doing outness for the men in this study.

Other factors may also play a role as to why gay men are able to form these relationships with straight men. Kaufman (1994) claims that masculine ideals that heterosexual men have not been able to live up to have caused straight men to refrain from “doing emotion” and forming close friendships with other men, which in turn has caused them significant pain. He argues that the pro-feminist movement in the United States has allowed straight men to interact more with gay and bisexual men. He states, “What was once a secure relationship between power over others, control over oneself, and the suppression of a range of needs and emotions is under attack. What has felt stable, natural, and right is being revealed as a source of oppression for others and a prime source of pain and anguish for men themselves” (Kaufman 1994, 159). As a result, he posits that gay men and straight men have more frequently come together, worked together, and danced together, evidence of which is found in several stories shared by men in this study. Both Ben and Ken offer stories that support this theory.

Ken, who prefers social relationships with men over women, including straight men, mentioned that he has “always had a series of men friends who were fairly sensitive, not always gay by any means, but sensitive men who I felt comfortable sharing with. I have never had that kind of relationship with a woman, where I would call her up and say look I’m really hurting, we need to talk.” Ken told stories of relationships with several straight men with whom he had developed strong bonds over the years, including, “my two best working
relationships were with men, Gerald and Don. Don and his wife and I would go out to dinner, and we always had fun together.” For Ken, having meaningful working relationships with straight men has always been the norm.

Ben offers an even more striking example of a unique relationship formed with a co-worker. He shared that he “dated a straight guy at work for a long time.” When asked to clarify what he meant by “dated,” he stated:

We went to the company Christmas party together, and I picked him up beforehand and we went to dinner first. We pretty much hung out with each other the whole night and as we were leaving he started complaining about how these things depress him so much and I asked why. He said because everyone there has got their wife or their girlfriend and I cannot find one. I just stopped and looked at him and said, “Well, have you ever thought about a boyfriend?” He gets this very thoughtful look on his face and looks at me and simply states, “No.” After that we spent a lot more time together and talked about it a lot. He took a job in another city and before he left we had dinner. I said to him at dinner, “You may really be straight, but I want you to know that I could really fall in love with you easily.” And he said to me, “You know, that is so totally ironic, because here I am desperately trying to find someone to fall in love with and you are sitting across the table, but I am straight.”

Ben is certain that his co-worker is straight, but admitted their friendship was very unique and not like anything else he had ever experienced before with a straight man. In both stories, these men are forming meaningful, non-traditional, friendships with straight men, which I believe are rooted in successfully doing outness but may also be the result of a convergence between doing outness and the social phenomenon referenced by Kaufman.

Emig (2000) in his analysis of pop culture and how gay and straight men are portrayed in the media and entertainment industry argues, “if the intriguing solidarity between straight and gay men brought about by commodity culture signals a new hegemony, then it must produce its own exclusions and fringes. First and foremost it is women who are placed at the margins of this hedonistic homosocial world” (Emig 2000, 223). He, too,
argues that the boundaries between gay and straight men have been weakened in recent years and as a result more friendships have formed between the once distant groups. It is now chic to have gay friends. Ken put it this way: “Most of the people I work with, they seem pretty open to sexual orientation, and some people are too open. They are sort of what I call limousine liberals that treat you as their token gay friend.” The role of pop culture cannot be downplayed, and very well may be influencing straight men to be more comfortable forming friendships with gay men. However, the role of doing outness must also be factored into this argument. Visibility alone is not enough to break down these social barriers; it must be coupled with something much more personal, occurring at the one-on-one level between individuals. If gay men can effectively do outness and present themselves in a manner that makes them approachable, or points out that they are not all that different than straight men, then, and only then, can these relationships take hold.

The friendships, mentoring relationships, and social networks of gay men (with straight men) described in this section, as a result of these men effectively doing outness, at least point to an ability for gay men to successfully navigate the workplace relative to their straight male counterparts, and in some cases even use these relationships to advance professionally. However, as mentioned before, the energy and additional work that many men put into these efforts cannot be ignored. While the majority of men in this study indicated a greater comfort level working with women and other gay men and in many cases a real discomfort in having to relate to straight men, most understood the professional need to interact with straight men and to effectively manage these relations. And, in most instances, they are the ones advancing the effort of forming these relationships with straight men.
Others, who were more adamant about their inability to relate to straight men, in turn, may not benefit in the same way because they lack these straight male interactions. This would point to in inability or unwillingness to effectively do outness with straight men. However, most gay men in this study went out of their way to determine how to best interact with straight men in the workplace in an effort to be successful, and in some cases advance themselves professionally.

The timing of coming out, or the use of the dimensions of outness, should also be noted. Some of these friendships and mentor relationships began before the men came out as gay men (take Ben, for instance) to their straight counterparts, which likely made their relationship formations easier due to preconceived opinions that were not based on a reaction to sexual orientation. Additionally, each of these men managed their workplace identities (calling upon different scripts at different times based on situations in which they found themselves) as these relationships with straight men (and women) developed. In other words, presenting themselves in ways that were not stereotypically gay (i.e., talking about football and families or mingling at the gym) was clearly strategically tied to doing outness.

Seidman’s (2002) idea of the normal gay cannot be ignored either. Given the reality that these men behaved, particularly in their interactions with straight men, in an accommodating, non-threatening manner, they thus positioned themselves as “normal,” weaving this with their sexual orientation to generate a specific non-negative response. Also noteworthy is that the depth of several of these relationships were initially derived out of masculinized ideals such as Ben’s story of reciprocal tough love or William and his boss surviving a female dominated
office together, pointing to additional evidence that these specifically masculine identities were called upon when doing outness.

_Navigating two worlds_

What has been demonstrated thus far, by the recounting of specific and composite moments of engagement, is that gay white men are doing outness during their daily work lives, which has allowed them to interact effectively with both gay and heterosexual men and women. That said, a particular phenomenon was not only evident in their stories, but also directly spoken of by several respondents. This phenomenon is what I call the _navigation of two worlds_, and is unique to doing outness. The fact is that moments of engagement with homosexuals and heterosexuals were, in many instances, starkly different for these men.

Gary puts it this way:

> A straight female friend of mine once said, “You can operate in all these different cultures. You come in and out of them almost like a chameleon and you adapt to whatever the environment is.” I am really good at that. I think being gay forces you to do that. When you are growing up you learn how to do that. I have learned how to plug and play with whatever the situation, but I think that comes from being gay and knowing—trying—to fit in. You learn how to fit in. I think this has benefited me in the workplace.

When asked to elaborate on how this may have helped him in the workplace, Gary shared examples of fitting in with different groups, gays and lesbians, straight women, and straight men as well. In referencing straight men, he stated:

> I can put on the face. I can love football. I can have a conversation that makes them feel comfortable, that puts them at ease. I can put on my chameleon skin and become one of the guys. Where I do not go with them—and I am very conscious of this—I do not go to the point of being derogatory toward other minorities or women. When conversations turn that way, I voice my opinions. But I can surely be one of the guys. I can play the game.
Gary claims he can do just the same when interacting with women, finding common ground with them. In essence, Gary, and others have called upon identities performed during their earlier lives, prior to their coming out of the closet, as a means of doing outness. The fact they these men were socialized, or taught, how to be straight men was not lost to them after they came out of the closet as gay men. When needed, they used the scripts or codes that became known to them when they lived their lives as straight men during current day moments of engagement in the workplace. This presents a unique perspective and ability for gay white men, at once to draw upon the traditional straight male identities as well as their gay identities when doing outness. They can, in effect, move back and forth between two worlds—the dominant culture and their own gay sub-culture(s). Fee explains this as “gay men are sufficiently adaptable to enact heterosexual roles and know how to fit themselves into heterosexual ‘scripts’ and they are frequently called on to do it whether they want to or not” (Fee 2000, 56).

Dennis describes it as the way gay men can “move back and forth between the straight and gay world if they want. Many straight people do not know the difference and would be terribly surprised to find out about this.” He believes that gay men can use this to their advantage in their everyday lives because “it is easier for gay men to relate to straight men, to women, and other gay men than it is for straight men to relate to women or gay men.” All of these interactions speak to the powerful way in which gay white men are doing outness in the workplace, and likely other aspects of their lives. Dennis offers that this “broader life experience” and perspectives of gay men, primarily because they have lived and functioned as both gay and straight men at different points of their lives, “make them more attuned to
cues from other people around them, rather than just forging forward.” This too suggests a chameleon like effect whereby gay men assess their surroundings and act or respond accordingly. Or, as Mark explains it, “If you are in a subgroup, you can still relate to the majority culture in some ways and then speak to someone else within your subculture in a different way.”

Ken’s poignant story further solidifies this point, when he shared:

I grew up in small town Nebraska and went to a very small high school so I did the sports stuff because I had to. I never really loved it. I was good at football and played basketball. I hated it and was awful at it, but couldn’t really drop out. I remember reading the newspaper and tried to be able to fit into the conversations but not really caring about it. It was like work—trying to memorize all those sports numbers. To me it was a challenge to try to learn a box score in a baseball game but I tried to do it just so I fit in. But now I don’t need it as much as a survival tactic, but I still do occasionally draw upon those experiences in daily life situations.

Ken’s story is the perfect example of Connell’s (1995) moment of engagement with hegemonic masculinity, that point at which he took on the attributes of assumed appropriate masculine ideals in his childhood. After years of using sports to fit into the dominant culture, as to not be recognized as a gay youth, Ken learned very early what was necessary to survive. Despite being successful today and not necessarily needing to call upon these scripts, he still finds himself admittedly doing so from time to time in his work life.

Curt admits that he often “flirts with straight women at work in order to get something,” and that he will “use every available lever that he can pull to get done what needs to get done.” Curt acknowledges that all the women are aware that he is gay, but that still does not stop him from flirting or for the women to play along with him and have some fun with it. Despite the fact that those with whom these gay men are interacting are aware of their sexual orientation, calling up these straight identities demonstrates the ability of the gay
men to function in and understand the straight man’s (or woman’s) world and, in turn, allows them to effectively do outness. In these instances, these men are accentuating similarity as opposed to difference between the two groups—again catering to the “normal.” The distinction is, as Dennis articulates, “that straight people do not have to do this. They do not have to know or understand the gay world.” Still, the tool of calling upon multiple identities (including those learned while living in the closet) is a means for doing outness, and based on these findings, is also a technique gay men use to navigate the workplace to ensure their success, further pointing to the power of doing outness. Thomas Linneman supports this case when he argued that

as they navigate through the heterosexual world around them, gay men encounter risks in the form of opportunities for challenging hetero-normativity. If they take the risk, they manage to change someone’s mind about who homosexuals are, thus affecting the status quo, even if only a little bit. If they do not take the risk and decide instead to conceal their identity, then they lose the chance to create a more hospitable environment. (Linneman 2000, 87)

While Linneman is correct about the ability to change minds about homosexuals, the out gay men in this study often did so by intentionally calling upon heterosexual identities and affiliating them with the “gay identity,” thus changing minds through an assimilationist approach that suggests “gay is not that much different than straight,” and which may not challenge the status quo all that much. Telford (1996) acknowledges the role of assimilation in fitting into an organization and argues that men will surround themselves with others that verify their masculinities. Through the way in which they chose to do outness, the gay men in this study who took an assimilationist approach to building relationships with straight men were in some ways verifying their straight counterparts, but at the same time, challenging the presumed otherness of gayness.
Gay men also used their dimensions of outness to determine how and when to call upon their heterosexual scripts. Some men displayed these scripts in the workplace after coming out, while others did so before coming out in an effort to establish a preconceived notion of the individual before divulging sexual orientation. The preconceived notion was not that the individual was straight, but rather that he understood the world of the ones with whom he was interacting (presumed heterosexuals). The stories shared by the men in this study indicate their goal was to demonstrate a lack of difference between the gay male and the straight co-workers and to facilitate a lack of response to their sexual orientation from co-workers, thus effectively doing outness while successfully navigating their workplace. This provides further evidence that gay men are doing outness based on perceived benefit or threat. This is achieved through a complex series of observations and situations interwoven with the various display of identities to form an ideal scenario that ensures they can be both out and successful in the workplace. Stories like Curt’s indicate this approach might well be working. He shared a story of a former straight male boss, “Instead of saying wives or husbands, he always said significant other and he does that in deference to me. When we were talking about holiday parties, he wanted to have a get-together, and make sure that everyone came and brought their significant others.” Curt is convinced this happened because he came out to his boss just by simply talking openly about his partner, Tim. Curt claims his supervisor had no reaction when he realized his partner was male, other than from that point on he changed the terms he used to describe spouses to something more gay-sensitive than “wife or husband.” This represents a merger of sorts between the two
worlds—one gay, one straight—described above, and may in fact represent a "change in status quo" suggested by Linneman.

Engaging masculinities in the workplace

While some examples have already been shared as to how gay men engage masculinities in the workplace, looking specifically at the "masculinity factor" is an important lens of analysis when talking about gay white men's navigation of the workplace. Gay white men are, after all, still men. Connell (2002) acknowledges that "with growing recognition of the interplay between gender, race, and class it has become common to recognize multiple masculinities: black as well as white, working-class as well as middle-class. To recognize more than one kind of masculinity is only a first step. We have to examine the relations between them." Connell goes on to say that "hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer for the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women." However, hegemonic masculinity does not stop at just distinguishing between men and women, but also "the dominance and subordination between groups of men" (Connell 2002, 142).

According to Connell, "Oppression positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of the gender hierarchy among men. Gayness is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity. From the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, gayness is easily assimilated to femininity" (Connell 2002, 59). While Nardi argues that "to automatically assume that all gay men contest, modify, or challenge heterosexual
masculinity—or for that matter, that they all enact the same masculinity roles—does not take us beyond monolithic concepts of gender’ (Nardi 2000, 7). Throughout the examples in this study of men doing outness, these men do not, in fact, demonstrate a monolithic gender or one form of masculinity. From the previous section, one might argue that some men in this study did not challenge heterosexual masculinity, but rather emulated it in an effort to fit in or relate to their heterosexual male and female counterparts. And the men in this study did not demonstrate just one form of masculinity; when doing outness people like John, Daryl, Curt, and William demonstrated masculinities ranging from campy scripts with gay co-workers to talking about topics such as football with their straight co-workers depending on situations in which they found themselves. Hearn and Collinson (1994), in introducing the concept of multiple or composite masculinities, argue that men can hold composite identities at all times, but may prioritize some over others, given a certain situation. Again, these identities are called upon at different times based on different situations when gay men do outness.

However, it is this plurality of masculinities that makes it very difficult to analyze how gay white men in this study engage masculinities throughout their work lives. The purpose of this section of the manuscript is to explore and share, with the goal of dissecting, some of these various points of engagement. These various forms of masculinity will be reviewed in the context of those which support traditional masculine behaviors and beliefs and those that challenge traditional masculine behaviors and beliefs, as shared by respondents in this study.
Engaging traditional masculinities

While masculinities are complex and hard to define as traditional or non-traditional, several examples were illuminated from the interviews that can be categorized as “traditional” or where stereotypes dominated conversation. Take, for example, Mark’s declaration that “before I was out, I was in the majority—being a white male put me in the majority—so, you know, there is almost no discrimination. But, I guess there were times before I came out that it almost seemed like as a white man I could not get a break.” Mark’s interpretation that he was once part of the majority, but after coming out, he no longer belonged to that majority is noteworthy. It is also interesting that before realizing the distinction of being part of a minority group—as a gay man—he held the belief that he could not “get a break” as a white man.

These statements are very much rooted in the desire for white men to maintain control and closely tied to hegemonic masculinity. When asked to further clarify his statement, Mark continued by stating:

Because of government programs like Affirmative Action minorities get preferential treatment. I saw people who were not qualified being promoted because they fit a quota category. I would hope if I had the opportunity to be promoted it would not be because I fit someone’s quota, but because I deserved it.

He clarified that he witnessed promotions based on both gender and race, and while he proclaimed to support diversity, he argued that “the world does not see it; the world does not see white men as somebody who also represents diversity.” He further clarified that “it would bother me regardless of who they are or what quota they fill or what minority group they happen to be a part of. It would bother me if I were promoted for that reason, I would resent if I got promoted for those reasons. I want it to be because I earned it.” Ultimately
Mark invoked strong feelings regarding his status as a white man, clinging to his status as a white man juxtaposed to other groups, more so than his reality of being a gay white man.

Daryl shared similar feelings when explaining a recent situation in his workplace. Each year his company puts out a company calendar, and the most recent calendar contained photos of, as Daryl explains, “The obligatory Black, Asian, and Puerto Rican, and then the white guy, or actually white woman thrown in.” Daryl said after receiving the calendar he went to another gay co-worker and joked about the calendar, stating, “Where are the homos in here?” He acknowledged that as a gay man, he is not “easily spotted” but he was still upset about the calendar because “occasionally you’ll see a white male, but we’re not the first choice when people are in pictures. We are always the evil white male over here.” Daryl resented the calendar because it lacked representation of both his gay identity, as well as his white male identity.

In a later conversation about supervisors, Daryl acknowledged that he has learned a lot from “strong women” but stated the work style he appreciates most is “much more male dominated. I like direct, don’t fuck around, what’s wrong, tell me directly, let’s go, you know that kind of thing and I work with women who are like that, but mostly I have worked with women who will not zero in, or they sugar coat everything, or take twenty minutes to explain something simple.” Patricia Yancey Martin (1996) refers to this as an authoritarian leadership style, one which she argues can disadvantage women leaders when they use this style because they are abandoning their feminine demeanor and opens women up for criticism for behaving like “one of the boys.” Yet, in Daryl’s case, he actually values women managers who invoke this leadership style. Nonetheless, Daryl’s criticism of women who do
not manage in this manner, and his explanation of how most women he works with are closely tied to traditional expectations of women. Similarly, as mentioned earlier, Ken stated, “Men tend to be more direct and less catty,” and that women have different work ethics than men—statements rooted in stereotypes of women and their management styles. In both of these cases, Daryl and Ken rely heavily on their white male identity when discussing specific work situation, further evidence that these identities are still active and they can be called upon at any time.

Tommy’s position as a human resources manager requires him to interact with a diverse group of employees, and while he is out to most of them, he is still closeted among the blue-collar workers in the company. He shared the following story:

I walk ten feet outside my office and I have to wear a hair net and goggles. It is a whole new world and it was one of the concerns when I moved to this company, that I would be able to relate with these people. I soon found out that you just need to play the game. I walked in one of my first mornings on the job, and my partner has a Chevy Blazer, and I grabbed a Chevy coffee mug. Now, cars are not important to me, I could care in the least. I do not get into the Chevy versus Ford thing. So, I am walking in and guys on the floor start saying, “Great, he’s a Chevy man.” I say “Oh yes.” You know, you just play the game. I immediately realized they get into this Chevy versus Ford thing and I’ll play right along with it, so I do. And now, what has been one of the things I enjoy most about the job is that I connect with the production people, which is the group I had the most fear of. But, they really like me, and I like them and we have a good working relationship.

In this example, Tommy called upon traditionally blue-collar masculinities tied to the “Chevy versus Ford thing” and used it to engage a relationship with this segment of his company’s population. Tommy’s actions were not rooted in life experience, but rather mostly in stereotypes he invoked or assumed relative to the importance of types of automobiles to this group of employees. He assumes he’ll eventually come out to these employees, but it appears
he is already doing outness by calling upon identities to ward off gay stereotypes among this group prior to coming out to them.

In all of these examples, the gay white men in this study perpetuated or bought into stereotypes attributed to other groups of individuals—racial minorities, women, and blue-collar workers—and in doing so invoked fairly traditional masculine behaviors and beliefs. However, in other examples, the gay white men in this study challenged traditional masculine beliefs and behaviors.

**Challenging traditional masculinities**

Daryl talked about the biggest risk he ever took in his career relative to a run-in with an “aggressive, real tough and macho guy,” who was his boss at the time. He explains:

He would often stick around after hours. And, sometimes if you wanted to meet with him he would say, “Let’s get together at 6:30” or some other time that was after hours. So, we’d often get together later at night. He kicks back, he’s smoking in his office, we were not allowed to smoke, but everything gets real casual after hours. He got into some sort of conversation talking about someone’s tits and talking about banging some broad. He’s telling me he picked up this broad at this bar one night and fucked her and I was so angry. He knew I was gay. So, I said, “That is interesting, because I met this guy one night at a bar, and we went to the parking lot, I bent him over and fucked him silly.” That shut him up. I just figured we can play this game if you really want to play it. I just decided I really didn’t want to do this anymore, and I was not going to go to HR or anything like that, so I swapped stories with him as a way to stop his behavior. He got very uncomfortable and he never talked about anything sexual again.

Daryl challenged his supervisor by using an “in your face” approach to his sexuality and, at the time, assumed it might have negative ramifications on his career. In this example of doing outness Daryl combined his gay identity with what can be perceived as traditional masculinity and office banter. However, professionally, he shared that he was promoted
shortly thereafter and that there was no detriment to their relationship. Daryl thinks that because his boss liked strong responses and had a history of baiting people just to test them to see if they would stand up for themselves, he may have very well benefited from being defiant. Though Daryl used an aggressive, masculinized approach with his boss, his actions challenged the status quo and acceptability of talking about women in a derogatory manner as well as the stereotypes attributed to gay men, both of which carried certain risks.

Rich was put into a similar situation while working at a job fair aimed at recruiting new hires to his company. He attended the fair with two straight male managers who held similar positions to his in the company. While at the fair, Rich observed these men engaging in behavior he found offensive, primarily the way they were looking at and commenting on women’s physical appearances. While he stated their comments were not derogatory, he still felt them inappropriate given their setting. So when one man stated that a particular woman who walked by was “attractive,” Rich responded by saying, “And so is the man she is with.” His response “jarred them a bit and they realized that there is this ‘other life’ besides theirs. What I say may make them uncomfortable at the start, but they have to realize that what they say may make me uncomfortable. It was an interesting exchange.” He indicated that their behavior, at least for the remainder of the fair, changed. Though subtle, through doing outness Rich’s comments were an act of defiance and a challenge to what these two men viewed as “normal” behavior.

Ben had a similar experience when golfing with several straight male co-workers. In an effort to prove a point about “assumptions” he confronted a co-worker who was talking about his girlfriend by stating:
“Well I guess I don’t have to ask my question.” To which he responded, “What question?” And I said, “I was going to ask if you had a boyfriend.” There was not much of a reaction, and about three holes later he looked at me and asked, “Why did you want to know if I had a boyfriend—did you think I was gay?” So I responded by saying, “No, I didn’t think you were gay at all, I just thought there is no reason why you should necessarily presume one way or another.”

Ben admits, “That’s probably the riskiest I have ever gotten.” Nonetheless, in this example of doing outness Ben’s question challenged the heterosexual assumption so often present in the workplace.

Paul recalls when one of his closest (gay) friends from work left his position to move to another city. He admits being very emotional during this time. As his friend was leaving the office he began to cry. His friend was surprised by his reaction and encouraged him to stop crying so others would not see him. His response was, “I do not care who sees me cry. I don’t care who sees me hug you. I don’t care. It does not matter.” His reaction was one that likely fits stereotypes of gay men as weak, but he was defiant and refused to conjure up a more masculinized reaction to his friend’s departure.

These stories offer examples of doing outness in the workplace where gay men were defiant and unyielding to the expected behaviors, or typical masculine behaviors, expected of men. However, each of these men offered stories, mentioned earlier, where they played more masculinized roles, offering further evidence that situations—or moments of engagement—dictate the identities or behaviors gay men choose to display at any given time in the workplace. What does all of this mean? The gay white men in this study formed intricate webs, going back and forth between different identities, at once reinforcing traditional dominant cultural work norms, and then turning around and challenging these very norms in different moments of engagement. The implications of this are that gay men must enact a
balancing act in the workplace, whereby they can fit into the dominant culture, but still occasionally challenge those norms in an effort to create workplace change. Regardless, there is an opportunity for transformation and change tied to the actions of the men who are willing to take-on traditionally accepted masculine behaviors.

Summary

This chapter demonstrated the different techniques employed by gay men when doing outness. Specifically it looked at stark gender differences in how gay men do outness with women and men. Most gay men acknowledged a preference for working with women and cited many examples of strong working relationships. Many of these were predicated on what I have termed “being one of the girls” where through doing outness these gay men formed friendships with women around a presumed safety and sameness. Some men effectively used these relationships for professional advantage.

Additionally, in some situations gay men were able to connect with and build strong working relationships, even friendships with men. Most of these examples were with men who were considered gay-friendly. At the same time, examples were offered where the gay men in this study were doing outness in a way that fit with traditional workplace masculinity, and other examples where they challenged the heterosexual and masculine norms when interacting with straight men. All of these choices were made consciously and in the context of the situations in which the men found themselves.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: WHERE TO FROM HERE?

As I indicated at the beginning of this manuscript, I set out to conduct an in-depth analysis of how gay white men navigate the workplace in an effort to better understand if this unique sub-group of American society faces specific challenges relative to their work lives. Through the use of personal interviews with gay white men in corporate America, and the development and implementation of a model of doing outness, this manuscript advances a stronger understanding of what gay white men experience in the workplace and how they use their life experiences to effectively manage their work lives. While this study has clear implications for gay white men in the corporate workplace, it also has implications for a host of other social institutions, theories, policies, and concepts within the sociological discipline. This study has implications for both race and gender. In addition, it challenges, or adds to the concept of the ideal worker in today’s capitalist society. Finally, both academic and policy implications are present as a result of this research. I use this concluding chapter to gather results around these themes, as well as place this research in the context of an ever-changing climate for gays and lesbians.

The implications of doing outness

It can be argued that the men in this particular study have learned how to effectively navigate the workplace. None of these men discussed experiences with overt discrimination; most described their careers as enjoyable and favorably advancing, and they shared many stories of the formation of great workplace relationships with a diverse group of individuals
including other gays and lesbians, as well as straight men and women. However, effectively navigating a workplace does not necessarily imply success or come without limitations.

What became clear in the stories of the men in this study is that in their daily lives, including their work lives, there exists a constant effort to negotiate their sexual orientation. Through an intricate interplay of degrees and dimensions of outness, identities management, and specific moments of engagement, gay men are doing outness in an effort to survive and thrive in a heterosexually dominant world. Time and time again, men in this study shared examples where they went out of their way, often expending significant amounts of time and energy, to make certain their choices were appropriate given the situations in which they found themselves. In most instances this included efforts to demonstrate similarities (as opposed to difference) with their heterosexual work-counterparts. The very need to manage one's sexual orientation hinders one's ability to realize one's full potential and be completely successful. It is, at a minimum, a distraction, and could very well become an all-consuming effort, which in turn can prove harmful to one's health and well-being, including financial well-being in the context of the work life.

In this regard, some things simply have not changed from when Woods conducted his own study of closeted gay men. He stated, "For gay professionals, the drain on productivity should be apparent, given the issues of identity management. However a man manages his identity at work, his strategy consumes time and personal resources. Men who try to avoid the issues of sexuality altogether find their productivity sapped in a different way" (Woods 1993, 234). While displaying a dimension of outness greater than being closeted may be an overall healthier option for gay men, many of the same challenges tied to time expended on
managing identities still persist. Simply put, doing outness consumes time and personal resources, which in turn may have restrictive impacts on the ability for gay men to climb the corporate ladder or fully contribute within the workplace. Therefore, while on the surface doing outness appears to have allowed an entire subgroup of the American population to better integrate themselves into the dominant culture while divulging their sexual orientation, the underlying reality is that we still work and function in a divided culture where difference is not necessarily embraced and out gay men must often find ways to fit the dominant cultural expectations if they wish to advance within their work environments.

By exposing the reality of doing outness in this manuscript, my hope is to finally name the intricate and complex process that gay men (and perhaps lesbians) find themselves caught up in their daily lives. Through naming the process, we can begin to dissect doing outness and challenge the assumptions and behaviors on which it is predicated. My hope is that this manuscript will also sensitize heterosexuals to some of the realities of being gay in American culture. While the workplace challenges of women and other ethnic and racial minorities are well-documented, the documentation of the work experiences of gay white men adds to the existing literature of workplace inequality by finally challenging the historical categorization of white men by distinguishing between gay and straight white men, further exploring homosocial reproduction, and looking at the relationships between different groups of individuals in the workplace and how they impact the navigation of the workplace. This research also builds on the previous work by Woods, which specifically explored the work lives of gay men. Despite my assessment that some things have not changed since
Woods’ study in the late 1980s, I have to also point out that significant progress has been made.

The fact that more people feel comfortable being out in the workplace and sharing their personal lives (at least to some extent) is, in itself, an advancement worth noting and celebrating. Workplace challenges still exist, but by comparison to the respondents in Woods’ study, in general, the corporate workplace has become a better, safer place for at least some gay men, and many of these men are in fact advancing professionally. Additionally it should be reiterated that this study only looked at corporate America, which in its totality tends to provide one of the most positive work environments for gay men and lesbians. The experiences of gay men in other workplace settings likely vary widely, particularly in more conservative work environments, and most definitely in environments such as the military and religiously-affiliated workplaces. Finally, since this study specifically focused on men who demonstrated some degree of outness in the workplace, it must also be noted that men like Daniel, Rob, and James (introduced in Chapter 3), who are still completely closeted at work, do not have the same experiences as the rest of the men in this study. Despite progress, other gay men, like these three, still exist in the workplace and continue to struggle daily with their sexual orientation and workplace safely and survival.

**Implications of race and gender: Both matter**

Despite the fact that the men in this study demonstrated doing outness as a way to navigate the workplace, the reality of gender and race cannot be downplayed. The unique position of these men—at once belonging to the dominant culture of white men while also
belonging to a subordinate group as gay men—offers them opportunities that would not likely be afforded to other subordinate groups. Because sexual orientation is invisible, many of the men in this study chose not to reveal their orientation until it was deemed safe, which often meant establishing work relations with co-workers prior to coming out. This means doing outness is very different than doing gender, for example. The use of their status as white men likely opened doors and allowed them access to portions of the corporate environment that are typically not afforded to women and other minorities. Being male and being white are still, after all, valued in our society and in our workplaces. As a minority, gay white men still have the capacity—the choice—of fitting into the white male power structures prior to divulging their orientation (albeit as a concerted effort) by controlling when and how to share their orientation. They are not necessarily judged based on their orientation, but likely initially judged on their race and gender because both are instantly visible. For many men in this study, they often waited to come out until they established working relationships with co-workers, supervisors, and subordinates. The ability to manage expectation and reactions to their sexual orientation is unique to this minority subgroup because they can fit into the dominant culture before coming out. It also further substantiates Ward’s (2004) assertion that “not all differences are created equal.”

Lesbians and gay men of color would not have the same experiences and opportunities because they are either not white or not male (or both). In fact, in the context of race, gender, and sexual orientation, lesbians and gay people of color, who have the double (or triple) challenge of navigating the workplace as female or non-Caucasian while also doing outness, have to determine when, how, and if they should divulge their sexual orientation.
This implies that doing outness for lesbians and/or gay people of color is likely quite different than how the gay white men in this study chose to do outness, reiterating that doing outness is complex and impacted by many factors including race, gender and situation. Race and gender, coupled with sexual orientation, has the capacity to create layers of disadvantage for these subgroups and requires further exploration and research along the lines of the research conducted by Ward (2004) and Tagaki (1996). In the context of my own study, the race and gender of the white male respondents matter.

**Opportunity for transformation**

I would argue that the unique position of gay white men as they do outness does provide an opportunity for transformation, particularly of the white male power structures that exist within the workplace. Because race and gender matter—and because gay white men can participate in the dominant world of white men—the potential for change within the dominant white male structures exists. As mentioned earlier, the gay white men in this study found themselves reinforcing masculine ideals on one hand, while challenging many of these same ideals on the other. Though situationally determined, gay white men are often "graying" the lines between reinforcing bad practices and creating change through challenging traditional white male behavior. The men in this study offered examples of showing emotion (such as crying) and challenging heterosexual assumptions and the degradation of women during their daily interactions with heterosexual men while in the workplace. While no evidence of a “change agenda” was clearly defined or articulated among respondents in this study, a change agenda is nonetheless still feasible. Knowingly or
unknowingly, because of their varied life experiences tied to their sexual orientation which makes them different than heterosexual white males, the men in this study have the capacity to effect change, particularly among heterosexual white males, by demonstrating different viewpoints and causing the heterosexual white men to think differently after gender, sexual orientation, and long-held masculine ideals. Depending on how these gay men choose to do outness, the interactions between these two groups of white males can create a dialogue with the potential for a paradigm shift in how the dominant white male culture views their role and position in society. Harnessing this capacity for change and making it a conscious effort on the part of gay white men could have a far-reaching impact on changing workplace cultures and beyond.

In many ways these men are insiders to white male privilege, yet potentially outsiders because of their sexual orientation. Men in this study went out of their way to demonstrate that they were not that much different than their straight male counterparts, and for the most part, were successful in an effort to integrate effectively into the workplace. The complexities of doing outness allow gay white men (if they choose) to become insiders before divulging their sexual orientation. Once they are out to their heterosexual white male counterparts, they make choices of when and if they challenge assumptions and behaviors held by heterosexual white men. Again, for those who become insiders and choose to challenge assumptions about sexual orientation and gender, the capacity for change is present. This ability is likely only afforded to those gay white men who choose to integrate and/or assimilate at least in part with the dominant white male culture, keeping in mind that the option of being more activist is available when doing outness. While no men in this study
appeared to take a more activist approach in the workplace, exploration of the experiences of such men is also important to determine how their work lives differ from the men in this study. Gender and race matter, because in this concept being white and male, yet different, has the potential for using the insider status to point out other possibilities to heterosexual white males in power. These men can become insiders with power, and most importantly, power to create change. However, there is no clear evidence that gay white men will choose this path as opposed to adopting and adapting to the current white male dominant cultural expectations, particularly if they benefit from white male privilege.

Work by Fee (2000) and my own study at least point to the different life experiences of gay white men and insinuate that gay white men are likely to challenge white male heterosexual assumptions, if for no other reason than the fact that many are not congruent with the lives of gay white men in that through the processes of coming out and doing outness they have different life experiences. As Fee points out, for example, gay men are much more likely to show emotion and their lives, after coming out, have not necessarily revolved around meeting traditional masculine expectations in their everyday lives. They may, however, challenge white male heterosexual assumptions gingerly and in a non-threatening manner in order to not jeopardize their insider status. But, what is wrong with this approach? While white gay men may occupy as outsider within status (Collins 1986), they also have the unique ability to disguise themselves, at least for a chosen period of time, as true insiders. Having someone working from the “inside,” coupled with on-going efforts from outsiders to challenge the established power structures of white males, may be the most effective way of dissecting white male privilege and begs further consideration. Given
increased gay visibility and the reality that more gays and lesbians are coming out than ever before, the real potential of this insider phenomenon is yet to be seen and examined, but is one that we all need to closely monitor and encourage as a strategy and opportunity to create change.

Gender also proved to be a distinction in this study relative to the relationships gay men formed with straight women, something apparently less typical between straight men and women in the workplace. While a specific age-gap existed in these relationships—older gay men were less likely to maintain close relations with women—most men in this study relied on their relationships with women as part of navigating their workplaces. It appears to be an emerging trend, particularly that younger gay men and straight women form friendships and strong working relationships due in part that there is no fear of sexual predation and no need for gay men or straight women to impress one another. This too offers some capacity for change relative to traditional white male power structures. As more women have entered the workplace and have climbed corporate ladders, their interactions with gay men, who are no more increasingly out at work, should be more closely analyzed. What alliances have been formed? Have these relationships been mutually beneficial, and if so, in what capacity? Have these women been used as stepping stones by the gay white men? More in-depth research is required in this area, but my own study at least points to the possibilities for transforming the workplace through more gay male and female alliances, gay men bridging the gap between straight men and women, and the ability for insider gay white men to challenge straight white men to think differently about gender and sexual orientation. This
capacity for transformation might also be tied to formal and informal alliances between straight women and gay men like those formed between men and women in this study.

**Opportunity for “being one of the boys”**

While I have identified the capacity for gay white men using their insider status as an opportunity for creating change, the same could be said for the capacity to become “one of the boys.” Because their race and gender align with the dominant culture, and again because in doing outness sexual orientation can be strategically hidden or divulged, gay white men also have the opportunity to fit into the dominant male culture, and perhaps take full advantage of power, male privilege and patriarchy. As more gay white men come out in the workplace, they may eventually become fully integrated with their white male heterosexual counterparts, despite different life experiences. Gay white men in this study demonstrated, at least in some cases despite the awkwardness, the ability to network and successfully assimilate with heterosexual white men in their workplaces. Collinson and Hearn acknowledge that “like all identities, masculine selves constantly have to be constructed, negotiated, and achieved both in the workplace and elsewhere through simultaneous processes of identification and differentiation. These masculine identity strategies reproduce insecurity and competition, which in turn reinforce the perceived need for identity-protection strategies” (Collinson and Hearn 2004, 304). In most cases, the gay men in my study were able to call upon identities that allowed them to assimilate and form strong individual working relationships with heterosexual white males.
Depending on how attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals continue to shift in society, it is feasible, through greater visibility and acceptance, that gay white men benefit from their race and gender and not be adversely impacted based on their sexual orientation, providing less incentive to create workplace change. While the interactions and examples in this study were at the individual level between gay and straight white men, the capacity for structural level integration of gay white men also exists, further complicating the motivation for creating workplace change.

As Collinson and Hearn point out at a structural level “men’s power is maintained partly through their commonalities with each other. Typically, men are bound together, not necessarily consciously, by shared interest and meanings, dominant sexuality, socio-economic-political power, and representational privileges” (Collinson and Hearn 2004, 300). Despite the acknowledgement of many of the men in this study that they did not naturally find commonalities with straight men, often these men fabricated commonalities or went to great length to identify commonalities, often based on their role as devoted partner or family man. This allowed for a certain level of male bonding even between gay and straight men, arguably tied to their shared gender. If this trend continues, again, there is potentially less incentive for gay white men to work for workplace change. As Edwards points out, “Gay men remain men, with all the perhaps increasingly precarious privileges and benefits that maleness bestows on them. Although these may be both perilous and uncertain, gay men remain related to masculinity, and they cannot, and indeed, should not be understood as separated from it” (Edwards, 2004, 65).
Individual choices of these gay white men also impact whether or not they will work for change or simply assimilate. Gay white men in this study placed varied degrees of importance on their sexual orientation, as some identified more or less with their gender and/or race. Similar to the arguments of Ward (2004) and Tagaki (1996), different identities take on different levels of importance dependent on situation, which was true of many of the men in this study. As stated by Edwards, “Gay men do not constitute a homogeneous group, or even a unified category, and their position varies significantly according to such factors as social class, geography, race, or ethnicity, let alone individual politics, practices, or preferences” (Edwards 2004, 65). Out gay white men do not constitute a homogeneous group, therefore, making it more difficult to predict whether or not transformation possibilities or full assimilation will prevail. The process of doing outness demonstrates the ability for gay men to call upon multiple identities to fit different situations, further demonstrating the complexities of gay men relative to their heterogeneity. Nonetheless, additional research in this area is essential, if for no other reason than the possibility for increased mobilization by white gay men as a force for organizational and workplace change.

In addition, I agree with Collinson and Hearn relative to men and masculinities in the workplace, when they argue, “There needs to be greater focus on the interconnections, tensions, and contradictions within and between the different aspects of workplace power, culture and subjectivity. While recognizing a multiplicity of possible masculinities and workplace sites, analyses also need to retain a focus on the structured asymmetries of gendered power relations” (Collinson and Hearn 2004, 305).
Capitalist implications: The new ideal worker?

While not discussed at length earlier in this manuscript, a recurring theme emerged in the interviews with the gay white men in this study. The idea that gay men are an extension or new version of the ideal worker might partially explain why the men in this study were able to effectively navigate the workplace. Acker talks about the “universal worker” as someone who is “actually a man—men’s bodies, sexuality, and relationships to procreation and paid work are subsumed in the image of the worker” (Acker 1990, 139). Much has been written over the years about the “ideal worker” in the context of corporate stereotypes of certain people and how they impact hiring decisions. Several participants in this study indicated their perceptions and often those of their supervisors that gay men are “ideal” employees, which is yet another dimension to how and why gay men use various dimensions of outness as strategy or potential benefit. For instance, William claims that:

I have had all the opportunity in the world in both of my work environments and I would say more so as far as with my current company. It’s very dog-eat-dog and I would say that it’s an advantage, my being gay, that I don’t have a family to go to, as far as a family with kids. I have a partner, but he is on a very strict career path himself. Being able to work eleven or twelve hour days is a huge advantage. I would say it for both retail and telecommunications industries. If you are willing to put in the hours, by god, you are going to be rewarded and you can move up quickly.

William is not alone in his thinking. John added that his training responsibilities often require him to travel extensively. He concluded that “I suppose gay men make good trainers because on one level they don’t have the commitments of having a family to support and so they can go on the road and do these things.” Within the service unit of his company, John stated that “I’m certain they wouldn’t publicly announce that they were looking for gay men to fill positions, but it’s one of those things in the service group that the managers hired tend
to be gay and they assume gay men like to travel." John also shared that while it is a stereotype, the company has a branch office in San Francisco, and people in the company joke that it helps recruit gay men into the company. In this regard, John’s perception is that it is beneficial to be out in his company.

Tommy, as a human resource professional with his previous company, estimated that one international branch office of the company comprised twenty-five percent gay men and lesbians. The company president asked, in a supportive manner, why so many gay men and lesbians were attracted to this particular office. Tommy’s response appears to feed the before mentioned notions:

I told him a couple of reasons. For one, international work is extremely demanding and there was a lot of travel involved and you are asking people to pick up and move and leave their home for two to five years. I think a lot of gay and lesbian people are in a position where they can do that, and want to do that. They look at it as a challenge. This is really stereotyping, but I think gay people because they are uncomfortable with their sexuality early on in life, really focus on the books and are intelligent and very resilient, which is what we need in an international setting—people that have shown resilience. They are not frightened of being rejected, which is one thing we look for when we send people on international assignments. On an international assignment, at some point you are going to fail. Another thing is that gay people can put all their energy into becoming the best at their job because they don’t have to go home to a family, so they put in the long hours, they are willing to travel, and they have resilience. Also when you go to work for an international company, you are going to be exposed to cultural differences or different ways of thinking, and to gay people this is not frightening, whereas to some people that have never had that exposure, they’re very frightened. That is why I think we had a huge population of gays and lesbians in this international office.

Over time, Tommy indicated that the company actually went out of its way to support gay and lesbian couples willing to take these international assignments. He indicated the company treated domestic partners as if they were married couples and sent them along on trips to these foreign countries. He cited one example where a gay couple was sent to Mexico
and once the Mexican counterpart found out they were gay, he refused to do business with the company. The president called them and tried to “reason with them” but the company had to bring the couple back to the States, where they were taken care of and reassigned to Hong Kong. After a short period of time, the Mexican counterpart called back and indicated they wanted the original person back because of his quality of work, a fact that Tommy points out supports his idea that these types of positions are well suited for gay men and lesbians. In this example, not only was the company supportive of hiring gay men and lesbians in this particular unit, but also the human resources manager assigned the project, Tommy, was also gay and actively recruiting gay men and lesbians for these positions. Gay men and lesbians, as it turned out, were the ideal workers for this division of this particular insurance company in the eyes of not only senior management but also the human resource director himself.

Connell (2002) argues that a more generic managerial masculinity has taken over. The new-model executive is a person with few permanent commitments, but a driving interest in profit opportunities for the firm, and is willing for career reasons to jump between firms—and in an age of global business, willing to jump between continents. This description fits Tommy’s story of why gay men were favored in his company, and begs the question: Do gay men fit a new definition of the ideal worker?

These examples further support what still prevails as the ideal worker in American culture. Joan Williams (2000) in her book, Unbending Gender, argues that while some aspects of the workplace have shifted, not much has effectively changed over the past few decades and that “domesticity remained the entrenched, almost unquestioned, American norm and practice” (Williams 2000, 1). Gender and gender expectations still play a
significant role in how, if, and when men or women advance within the workplace, as well as what type of jobs men and women secure. Williams goes on to state:

As a gender system, it has two defining characteristics. The first is its organization of market work around the ideal of a worker who works full time and overtime and takes little or no time off for childrearing or childbearing. Though this ideal-worker norm does not define all jobs today, it defines all the good ones. Domesticity introduced not only a new structuring of market work and family work but also a new description of men and women. The ideology of domesticity held that men “naturally” belong in the market because they are competitive and aggressive. (Williams 2000, 1)

While several men in this study appear to provide additional evidence to Williams’ claims based on their own perceptions of their workplace (albeit not described as a gender related benefit), the fact that these are out gay men adds a new dimension to Williams’ argument that takes it beyond just gender and adds sexual orientation.

Given the important role of family life and parenting to Williams’ central argument, the perceptions of the gay men (and reportedly their supervisors) in this study—the fact they did not have families to care for—adds yet another layer to the concept of the ideal worker that needs further exploration. Although potentially rooted in stereotypes held by employers and often the gay employees themselves, are employers consciously turning to gay men to fill positions that are perceived to be inconsistent with employees who might have families? Have gay men used this to their advantage in climbing the corporate ladder? While this has not been the primary focus of this study, it is an element closely tied to doing outness and how gay men might use their sexual orientation to navigate their work environments as well as use their sexual orientation to their advantage.

Looking at the situation inversely and at a macro or structural level, one might argue it is a method whereby capitalism takes advantage of employees based on certain
characteristics, in this case sexual orientation. White males continue to be more highly valued in the workplace because of their gender and race and the continued devaluation of women and motherhood. Because gay white men are the preferred race and gender and are perceived to not have the baggage of family, do they become ideal in a capitalist structure? While further research is needed in this area, this observation might very well play into why corporations have become more gay-sensitive and why some managers may be more willing to hire or even seek out gay men as employees, thus making doing outness potentially easier (or obsolete) over time for men in the workplace. Conversely, as family patterns among gays and lesbians, particularly the emergence of more gay and lesbian families with children, will this ideal worker pattern quickly disappear? Nonetheless, in the meantime, if the new ideal worker is the gay male (and/or lesbians) the potential for perpetuating workplace inequality through the continuation of the devaluation of family and motherhood is strong. The function of capitalism at a structural level cannot be ignored in addressing the work lives of gay men, particularly since we know gays and lesbians have been identified as a target (or niche) market in the mass marketplace and as a targeted labor market.

**Gay visibility and the changing gay culture**

Regardless of macro and micro level influences on the work lives of gay men and how gay men are doing outness in the workplace, a well-documented phenomenon is taking place in American culture relative to the gay and lesbian communities. I began this manuscript by acknowledging that the last decade has proven to be one of great change and fluidity for gays and lesbians. I close this manuscript again reiterating this important point
with a discussion of the implications of this fluidity, for the very reason that the changes in
the larger society necessarily impact the daily lives of gay men and lesbians, including their
work lives.

Walters (2001) in her book, *All The Rage*, acknowledges that gay visibility has
increased dramatically in recent years. While her structural level analysis focuses heavily on
popular culture, particularly mass media, her point that these venues dramatically impact
public opinion is well taken. She argues that one of the most significant questions facing the
gay communities today is whether “we will assimilate into mainstream, commercial,
heterosexual American culture or maintain our own distinct subculture identity” (Walters
2001, 292). In a more micro sense this is what many of the gay men in this study were
distinguishing for themselves in the workplace. In the conclusion of her book, Walters
writes, “I feared for our movement, afraid our rage—the rage of the closet, the rage of the
unseen, the rage of the despised, the rage of the abject—would be re-channeled into hip aggro
so anxious straights could relax and welcome their assimilated gay neighbors into their
suburban backyards” (Walters 2001, 294). She continues by stating, “I was worried about
commodification and assimilation, wondering if this was the price we had to pay for some
modicum of ‘acceptance’” (2001, 295). The arrival of gay and lesbian visibility into mass
media over the past decade has made assimilation more feasible for gays and lesbians than
ever before. Walters also argues that assimilation, or its possibility, has not yet led to full-
fledged civil rights for gays and lesbians, and questions whether or not it will help or harm
civil rights efforts.
Walters also argues, that despite assimilation possibilities, there are "moments when the ground of heterosexual terra firma begins to rock and quake, not knocking foundations perhaps but shifting things around a bit, insisting on a sort of remapping that leaves little untouched" (2001, 296). She, too, eludes to the transformational possibilities tied to gay and lesbian visibility, much like that of which I spoke earlier relative to gay white men in the workplace. Walters sums it up this way: "The gaying of American culture. The blurring of the lines. The messy mixing up. If the gaying of American culture irrevocably changes gays, now living in a social space of brazen visibility, does it also irrevocably change heterosexuals, no longer able to turn away quite so easily or with such blithe indifference" (Walters 2001, 296).

Further iterating that the gay communities are at a crossroads in their evolution, Daniel Harris (1997) in his book, The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture, argues that the gay subculture is coming undone and partly due to economics and commercialization. Additionally, he argues that activists within the communities are increasingly:

anxious to tone down or eliminate altogether our idiosyncrasies as a minority, which some activists treat as a necessary casualty of progress, the price we must pay for social acceptance. In the three chief fabrications of gay propaganda—the Good Gay, the Happy Gay, and the Uxorious Gay—we have seen that the obliteration of the gay sensibility, of our effeminacy, campiness, gay culture, is its worst enemy, a savior that will ultimately strip us of our distinctive ethnic features. (Harris 1997, 269)

He too believed that assimilation is on the rise in the gay communities, and that it is likely to continue. He concludes that the demise of gay culture is inevitable because its existence is dependent on the persistence of oppression. He concludes by stating:

The fact remains that we feel sentimental about things like camp, drag, and aestheticism now that they are disappearing into the oblivion of the world dominated by Coke commercials and sitcoms. The process of assimilation itself is unpleasant,
and we recoil from the sight of the extreme homogenization of American culture, of a monolithically uniform melting pot gobbling up its minorities, wiping them out through television and mass marketing. It is this complex and ambivalent attitude toward assimilation, toward both its necessity and its ultimate ruinous impact on us as a minority that marks the pages of this book. (Harris 1997, 271)

While Harris is predicting a future that has not yet arrived, he does raise many of the same questions others like Walters have raised relative to where the gay communities are headed as they become increasingly visible. These same questions about the future apply to gays in the workplace.

Emig (2000) offers a slightly different interpretation of what may be taking place as a result of increased gay visibility. In looking at fashion trends, Emig argues that a blurring between gay men and straight men has occurred due mostly to the commercialization of gay culture as acceptable. He posits that consumerism has taken over and corporations have identified the ability to mass market gay culture, and attributes such as fashion, to a wider, straight audience. He states that

the consumerist-motivated adoption of gay styles by the hegemonic straight majority has an interesting gay equivalent in the tendencies embodied in some 1990s arguments concerning homosexuality. The early gay rights movement of the 1970s had emphasized difference and the right to be tolerated by the majority. This move went hand in hand with the establishment of an aggressively visible subculture and gay ghettos. The 1980s and 1990s displayed a shift of this segregational attitude towards a very different emphasis, no longer on difference and toleration, but on similarity and integration. (Emig 2001, 215)

This too relates to the findings among the gay men in my study, the idea of stressing similarity and integration with straight co-workers. This is occurring while the mass media is commercializing gay culture to the very same straight men that work in corporate America alongside gay men.
Additionally, Emig analyzes various forms of mass media, including television, specifically the television series *Queer as Folk*, which depicts unapologetic, predominantly male, gay lives. The overall success of the show, including high viewership among straight men and women, has surprised many. Emig, however, argues that the reasons for such an apparent change of attitudes, of hegemonic values being softened or indeed reversed, have to be sought in the similarities and parallels between so-called straight and gay lifestyles in the late twentieth-century. My examples from *Queer as Folk* already indicated that in terms of workplace and ostensible consumerism there is little that differentiates the two. Business suits and mobile phones as fashion accessories in an urban environment, designer flats to impress friends with and seduce lovers in, these are desirable status symbols for gay and straight men alike. What might therefore appeal to straight young men in *Queer as Folk* could be the depiction of a lifestyle that also represents their own, or more than that, an idealized version of their own. (Emig 2001, 221)

While he speaks mostly of younger men, both gay and straight, the point that the lines between the two have been blurred is one worth noting and is consistent with the idea of at least a certain form of assimilation. What is different in this example is that the straight men are adopting some of the practices and fashions of gay men, as well as idealizing their lifestyles. Some examples existed in my own study of where straight men met gay men on the gay men's terms as they developed friendships and mentoring relationships at work. This further points to the capacity for change, at least relative to the gay-straight binary division.

These macro-level discussions of assimilation and visibility of gays in American culture have very specific implications for how gays function in the workplace and must be considered when digesting the findings of my own study relative to the work lives of gay white men. It is also notable that Walters, Harris and Emig write mostly about a mass media culture which is predominantly white and male, thus making sense of many of the parallels between their findings at the cultural level and my own within the context of the workplace.
The role of consumerism and commercialization in each of their arguments also has implications on my own study, which was conducted in the context of the capitalistic corporate environment.

The changes referenced above, however, are happening outside the context of politics. The political climate for gays and lesbians is mixed at best. While some gay-friendly legislation has passed in recent years, all signs are pointing to period of time marked by backlash against gays and lesbians, evident in the most recent 2004 election cycle where eleven states passed anti-gay legislation by writing marriage bans (and in some cases civil union bans) into their state constitutions. The religious right wields significant political capital and many of their efforts are directed at gays and lesbians. Whether or not this political backlash impacts the work lives of gays and lesbians is yet to be seen, but with the rise of more corporations led by fundamentalist Christians, the potential exists.

Change is occurring every day in society, and the rapidity of this change is apparent relative to gay and lesbians rights and social movements. This rapid change makes studying the lives of gay men and lesbians especially difficult, yet timely. What is occurring at one moment in time very well could shift in the matter of just a short period of time.

Nonetheless, the study of gay men and lesbians as a subgroup of society has far-reaching implications for sociological theory and research. The lives of gay men and lesbians must be part of the equation in sociology in order for us to better understand social inequality and its many faces and forms. I strongly argue the unique positioning of gay white men, at once as a part of the dominant white male culture and simultaneously belonging to the gay subculture, make studying this societal group especially important as we continue to work toward
identifying positive and transformational change strategies relative to social inequality structures in American society. We must examine this positioning of gay white men in both a macro-structural sense and on an individual situational level.

The unique process of doing outness among gay white men has the capacity to facilitate the maintenance or creation of inequality in the workplace should gay white men choose to assimilate and take full advantage of white male privilege and patriarchy. At the same time, doing outness has the capacity for creating positive change relative to social inequality should gay white men choose to become insiders to the dominant white male power structures and challenge the existing structures to change through the promotion of accepting and embracing difference and creating a more equitable environment for everyone. The macro, structural level influences of capitalism, mass media, and the directions in which gay acceptance or rejection goes in the coming years will combine with a reality that gay men and lesbians are interacting with their straight counterparts and each other on a daily basis in all facets of their lives, including the workplace. The structural and individual level interactions very well may dictate which direction straight men move toward—assimilation or change agents. The productive tension of structural-level influences and the everyday individual interactions of gay men and lesbians will continue. How doing outness mediates these two levels of influence very well might determine whether or not gay men and lesbians reach full equality in our society.

For all those who care about creating positive change relative to social inequality, we need to seize the moment and acknowledge that how gay white men do outness offers us a unique opportunity to work toward positive change. We must find ways to take advantage of
the insider status and unique life experiences of gay white men in our quest for social change. As more and more people choose to come out of the closet, we stand at a crossroad, both at a macro-societal level and in our daily interactions: Do gay white men assimilate and perpetuate power imbalances and inequality or do they use their unique position to challenge the status quo and work from the inside for change?
APPENDIX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>TITLE/INDUSTRY</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albert</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Software developer and manager/publishing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Director (company officer)/insurance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Systems analyst/energy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Curt</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Operations manager/telecommunications</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>vice president and co-owner/health insurance</td>
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<td>Daryl</td>
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<td>Support center manager/information technology</td>
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<td>Dennis</td>
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<td>Book editor/publishing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Human resource manager/banking</td>
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<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Manager and owner/retail</td>
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<tr>
<td>John</td>
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<td>Developer/information technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>59</td>
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<td>Mark</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Customer service representative/retail</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
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<td>Engineer and manager/telecommunications</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rich</td>
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<td>Financial planner/financial services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Computer technician/information technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tommy</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Human resources director/agri-business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Customer service manager/telecommunications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


