

WALKING A FINE LINE: UNDOING GENDER? A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF
MEN IN INDIE ROCK BANDS

THESIS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Sociologists define gender as masculine and feminine behaviors, norms, beliefs, and practices (see for e.g. Kimmel 2004). Gender provides the beliefs and ideals that individuals attach to their biological sex. Males and females utilize gender to identify their sex when interacting with one another. In the overall structures of society, gender supplies the rules and norms that the sexes are to follow. The day-to-day interactions that males and females experience and use when forming their identities and maintaining their positions in society are influenced by gender. Gender is not a sex category rather it is a social construction.

Gender identities are founded on a dual sex system (male or female) structured around normative social ideals of difference and serve as an institution of social control. Sociologists study gender in order to understand how it affects social institutions, how it develops a system of power that acknowledges one gender as better than the other (patriarchy). Patriarchy is defined as males maintaining more power than females (Connell 2005). Researchers also investigate how gender influences interaction among men and women, and how it affects people's identity. By analyzing how people construct masculinity and femininity, researchers are better able to understand how society and individuals work as a whole, and how to consider social change. Changes in

cultural beliefs about gender can range from better marriages to equal pay in the workforce, but overall, equality is a staple goal for most studies on gender.

Due to its dominant role in the gender structure, masculinity has been a prominent subject for gender research. For men, the structure of gender is comprised of several masculinities: hegemonic, subordinate, complicit, and marginalized, because men differ from each other when constructing their gender identity (Connell 2005). Many men uphold a gender identity that has a very strict definition of what it is to be masculine and in many ways is unattainable. Western definitions of appropriate and valued qualities of masculinity include an emphasis on large muscles, showing little to no emotion, demonstrating competition, and sexualized talk about women. The term hegemonic masculinity defines these Western requirements for manhood. Connell (1997) writes that hegemonic masculinity is “heterosexual, aggressive and competitive, and homo-social (excluding women from its social networks). It emphasizes hierarchy and the capacity to dominate other men as well as women” (7). Hegemonic masculinity forces many men to conform to norms through stigmatization, which only hinders the full potential for how a man acts, socializes, and affects the world around him.

Symbolic interactionists indicate that through personal interaction with both sexes, men do gender in order to signify their gender identities to others (West and Zimmerman 1987). West and Zimmerman (1987) contend that “the ‘doing’ of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production. Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine ‘natures’” (126). They also claim that people consciously and

unconsciously do gender (West and Zimmerman 1987). West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that because doing gender is institutionalized throughout interaction, the process allows for gender interactions and social relationships to be directly influenced by the normative gender identities of society, which are based on differences between men and women. In response, Deutsch (2007) maintains that the doing gender theory never allows for changing the normative gender order. This enables the idea that a dominant and oppressive gender hierarchy is unavoidable, which is a very dreary outlook. In opposition, she contends that because gender is socially constructed by men and women in day-to-day interactions, it can also be socially deconstructed. Deutsch (2007) indicates that by undoing gender through human agency, the gender order can be undermined in order to create an un-oppressive gender system. Recently, some men have begun to defy the hegemonic masculinity of society by displaying feminine characteristics along with their masculine identity in order to deconstruct their gender ideology (Deutsch 2007).

One group in particular that has embraced this alternative gender ideology is the men of indie rock bands. Hesmondhalgh (1999) defines indie as "a popular music genre" which began in Britain but started to flourish in America in the early 1990s under the category of "alternative rock" (35). The term "indie" is an "abbreviation of 'independent' (as in independent record company)" and is the first music genre to be named after "the form of industrial organization behind it" (Hesmondhalgh 1999:35). Indie rock created autonomy for the musical artists from corporations and mass societal influence (Hesmondhalgh 1999). Through this autonomy, male indie rock artists are not only defying the norms created for music, but are also beginning to challenge the socially dominant gender norms. Male indie rock artists are displaying "feminine" characteristics

through the use of fashion, dancing, overt affection toward other males, the open expression of feelings in their songs and conversation, and the outright rejection of hypermasculine attitudes. Most of the previous research concerning groups of people alternatively constructing their gender or rejecting the gender/sexual norms of society pertains to women and homosexuals (Butler 2006; Connell 2005; Schippers 2002). There is little research on how groups of heterosexual men are defying the hegemonic norm and creating more egalitarian gender identities. My study on men in the indie rock scene follows Deutsch's idea by understanding how these men are deconstructing their gender on stage, resisting the masculine norm, and whether they are undoing or doing their gender. Learning how these men socially construct their gender will hopefully provide insight into whether these men are maintaining the binary gender order, or more importantly, deconstructing the gender order to produce more egalitarian gender relations.

My study will analyze the following research questions: How do men in indie rock bands engage and resist masculine norms? How do they construct their alternative gender identity?

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many sociological studies have focused on how gender is socially constructed. Butler (2006) defines gender as a “free-floating artifice” subject to the cultural meanings placed on it at that point in time (9). In Western civilizations, gender is restricted by an ideal binary sex system that idealizes the male and female body only (Butler 2006). Connell (2005) conceives of gender as structured social practices. Other studies assert that gender is a socially constructed role. Role theory focuses on how gender is socially learned in coherence with the normative, biological sex roles (Kimmel 2004). The theory also contends that gender roles are universally defined as masculine or feminine and are regularly reproduced in society by individuals (Kimmel 2004).

Contemporary gender scholars reject role theory because of its limiting affect when defining the power of gender in society, its inability to explain the many different definitions (culturally, sexually, racially, and socially) of gender maintained by men and women, and its failure to recognize how men and women refer to one another when constructing their gender (Kimmel 2004). In particular, West and Zimmerman (1987) identify roles as “situated identities” that are created in a process that depends on the situation (e.g. nurse and mother) (West and Zimmerman 1987:128). Gender, on the other hand, is not specific to one situation and influences other roles that a person maintains. For West and Zimmerman (1987), gender is not a role learned through institutions, but

rather a social process of conscious and unconscious practices composed through interactions (gestures and expressions) in order to identify with the correct gender display of one's biological sex. Through this process, gender is socially constructed (Lucal 1999). Bemiller (2005) also points out that sexuality is socially constructed. Connell (2005) focuses on both gender and sexuality when studying how masculinities are constructed through gender relations among men and boys. For men, it is through situational interactions, such as playing or watching sports, with other men that gender and sexuality are learned in order to create masculinity.

Through interactions individuals create social identities to correspond with their gender. West and Zimmerman (1987) recognize that individuals create and use, when necessary, these identities with regards to their situation (women being both mothers and workers). They also theorize that members of society are involved in a "self-regulating process," where the use of social identities along with "gender ideals" and "gender identities" are used to maintain norm gender behavior (142). Butler (2006) attributes identities to the restrictive nature of the hierarchical gender order. In effect, this social control process creates normative gender differences among the gender identities of individuals in society.

Butler (2006) identifies gender identity to be performative, "always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed" (34). West and Zimmerman (1987) contend that "the 'doing' of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production. Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine 'natures'"

(126). The situated identity of gender causes it to affirm and be affirmed by the social structure and divisions within society. Therefore, gender interactions and social relationships are directly influenced by the normative gender ideologies of society, which are based on differences between men and women. When individuals do gender, their social identities are influenced by socially shared gender ideals, causing them to moderate their behavior and adhere to the binary gender system of inequality.

Gender theorists have also focused on the body as a “vessel” for performing gender and the construction of gender identities. Butler (2006) describes the body as a tool for the social construction of gender. She identifies how social ideals construct boundaries based on the binary sex norm that are used to maintain the “surface politics of the body” rendering it a “passive medium” (Butler 2006:175, 185). The sexes adamantly uphold the politics concerning the body as an instrument of gender distinction through superficial bodily displays of normative gender practices (e.g. women wearing makeup, men wearing suits) (Butler 2006). These bodily displays or gender performances allow individuals to uphold their gender identities in coherence with desired social norms. However, Schippers (2002) indicates that bodies are constructed based on interactions with other bodies and can be instruments in the disruption of the gender/sexual norms, depending on a subculture’s politics of the body. Also, Connell (2005) asserts that men’s bodies are subject to change over time and can be used as mechanisms of agency to subvert the gender norms of society.

Research focusing on masculinity identifies inequality as essential to the maintenance of the normative masculinity. Connell (2005) asserts that there are dominant and subordinate masculinities constructed in society that form a hierarchy of

power relations among men and women. Hegemonic masculinity is identified as the dominant form of gender in society. Connell (2005) defines hegemonic masculinity as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (77). Hegemonic masculinity exerts power (patriarchy) over both women and men, creating inequalities between and among the sexes. Connell (2005) identifies four power relations concerning masculinity: hegemonic, complicit, marginalized, and subordinate. In comparison to the hegemonic ideal, complicit masculinities maintain the patriarchal norms but are not adamant in enforcing the power; marginalized masculinities (e.g. black athletes) uphold “authorization of the hegemonic masculinity” but do not benefit from the power as a whole group; and subordinate masculinities (homosexual men) are seen as the opposite to the hegemonic norm being associated with the feminine gender (Connell 2005:80). For men, power relations are based around acts of violence, competition, prestige, rationality, and heterosexuality. These actions and bodily practices are performed in order to legitimize hegemonic authority in society.

In her research on male homosociality, Bird (1996) attributes male gender identity to social interactions among men, where gender meanings are “socially shared” and either “reinforced” or “weakened” in order to create more hegemonic gender ideals about masculinity (122). Bird identified certain shared meanings that men used to formulate their masculine identities. The men used emotional detachment (not expressing their feelings) to separate themselves from emotionally intimate behavior, which is characteristically identified as effeminate. The men were highly competitive with each

other, mainly through sports, in order to point out to their male counterparts their masculinity and dominance. Bird found that men used sexual objectification of women to maintain their masculine identity. By boasting about their sexual exploits through sex stories, the men indicated their male dominance. Bird attributes these socially shared meanings to men doing masculinity. Bird describes how hegemonic meanings are maintained through social interaction between the men as they do masculinity. By doing their gender, the men's hegemonic ideals became internalized into their own gender meanings as well as institutionalized throughout the group, thus rejecting other forms of masculinity to be acceptable among the group. Connell (2005) points out that because of this rejection of other masculinities, a strict ideal of behavior and feelings is allowed among men, creating many problems for those who are unable to uphold or identify with the masculine ideal (24). Therefore, men create aggressive methods in order to uphold the hegemonic ideal.

Likewise, Bemiller's study of male cheerleaders (2005) found that the male cheerleaders were constantly "labeled as non-masculine and homosexual for 'crossing over' into a female domain" (Bemiller 2005:213). Men acting outside of their ideal masculine social identities are identified as gender deviants. Misogyny and homophobia are two qualities that are used to force males into traditional masculine identities. Bemiller writes that when males "possess an undesired differentness from what is anticipated" they are stigmatized (212). To counteract their stigmatized identity, Bemiller found that the men used hypermasculine strategies to "save face" with other men who challenged their masculinity (215). The strategies included the men emphasizing their heterosexuality throughout the interviews in order to separate

themselves from homosexuals, and defining cheerleading as a masculine sport. The male cheerleaders also used aggression and violence towards men who criticized their sport and sexual identities, and they sexually objectified women (including the female cheerleaders) through obscene comments and actions. These strategies allowed the men to maintain the male gender norm when confronted with the non-masculine role associated with being a cheerleader. Kendall (2000) also found in her study on hegemonic masculinity portrayed in online forums, that men maintained their masculine identity and dominance through sexual jokes that objectified women. Based on these previous studies, I suspect that the men in my study would “do masculinity” differently than the men in these earlier studies.

In contrasting research, Schippers’ (2000; 2002) study on gender and sexuality in the early 1990s alternative rock scene reports both men and women “queering [their] sexuality” to allow for “gender resistance” to the hegemonic ideals of gender and sexuality (761). By resisting hegemony and alternatively doing gender, the women and men were “gender maneuvering” to reconstruct the gender system (Schippers 2002:16). Schippers (2002) defines gender maneuvering as “a process of negotiation in which the meanings and rules for gender get pushed, pulled, transformed, and reestablished,” in order to “manipulate the relationship between masculinity and femininity in ways that impact the larger process of gender structuration” (37). For the men and women of the alternative rock scene, the dominance of masculinity was resisted through the music, style, interactions between men and women, and language, in order to create an alternative gender order that possessed a more egalitarian and in some ways pro-feminist perspective. The women and men resisted norms by identifying male advances on

women as negative, accepting and acting out homosexual (primarily lesbian) behavior, rejecting male violence, objectification, and exploitation of women, and outfitting themselves in non-normative clothing for their gender (e.g. some women had shaved heads and wore men's flannel shirts and combat boots) (2002). In particular, the alternative women queered their sexuality by overtly engaging in sexual interaction with both men and women, thus calling into question the normative sexual dichotomy of heterosexuality and homosexuality and gender norms (2002). The women also performed hegemonic masculine practices in order to identify and actively ridicule the underlying sexism of the acts. However, Schippers (2000) notes that while queering sexuality and resisting gender norms can be effective, many of her subjects did not interact with or identify as a homosexual and referred to homosexuals with crude terms such as "dyke" and "gay," therefore upholding the hegemonic norms for heterosexuality through the "marginalization of gay and lesbian identities" (756). As much as the alternative rockers resisted gender and sexuality, they "did gender" and sexuality.

Some research explores groups who are beginning to reject the normative gender and sexual ideologies of our society. In her autoethnography, Lucal (1999) describes her experiences of being a woman who is mistaken for a man. She discusses how her gender bending physical characteristics allow her to become a "gender nonconformist" through the use of gender displays that do not connect with the perceived notions of gender by the members of society around her (784). Examples of this were constantly being called "sir," being questioned when entering public ladies restrooms, and being physically threatened by other men who mistook her for a man. However, she does identify as a "failure," since her gender is not shown in public regularly (e.g. wearing makeup and

having stylized hair), and because she allows for others to misinterpret her gender on a daily basis. In his study on masculine identities, Connell (2005) acknowledges the presence of a “protest masculinity” which he characteristically describes as one who does not prescribe to the normative male role; instead, the subject is “compatible with respect and attention to women..., egalitarian views about the sexes..., affection for children..., and a sense of display which in conventional role terms is decidedly feminine” (112). Connell (1997; 2005) provides information on subculture masculinities that break with the normative culture concerning sexuality and gender through activities of music, art, film, and literature. Research has identified men who have taken on a political identity, known as “effeminism,” that is submissive to the feminist movement (Connell 2005). Other research by Deutsch (2007) has focused on how members of society can undo gender. By challenging the gender boundaries of society through resistance of norm behavior (e.g. egalitarian family households), members gain “feminist consciousness” and are able to “reduce gender differences” in society (Deutsch 2007:121-22).

Queer theorists are also producing new theories and research concerning nonconformist genders and sexualities. These radical theorists insist that the normative binaries concerning gender and sexuality are incomplete and repressive. They assert that gender theories upholding the binary norms do not account for “a broad range of complicated social processes surrounding the meaning of bodies and the social cues, practices, and subjectivities associated with gender and sexuality” (Valocchi 2005:753). In reaction, queer theorists identify practices and interactions that reject the norm, focus on the abnormal intersections in the relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality, acknowledge the uncertainties that arise when constructing gender and sexual identities,

and promote radical activism and a “queering” of history to subvert the gender binary norm (Stein and Plummer 1994; Valocchi 2005). For queer theorists, gender and sexuality are anything but simple categories based on the male and female sexes.

Because of the problems associated with hegemonic masculinity, such as violence, emotional detachment, sexism, and homophobia, research about male groups who have either resisted the gender norms of society or have begun to create new gender identities based on traditional and newly created gender and sexuality ideals are needed. More research needs to be conducted with groups or individuals in society who are rejecting the notion of doing gender due to its conforming nature, and instead are undoing gender in hopes of removing the normative gender structure of inequality. My study on men undoing gender in the indie rock scene explains how and why they resist the hegemonic norms of society, and explores whether their creation of alternative, more effeminate gender ideologies and identities are undoing gender norms. The purpose of this research is to understand how these men engage and resist masculine norms and construct their alternative gender identity.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Because of the in-depth personal nature that comes with researching gender and sexuality, qualitative research methods were most appropriate for my study. Qualitative methods allowed me to study the emotions, feelings, and experiences that my subjects relate to with their gender and sexuality (Berg 2004). I chose to use semi-structured, in-depth interviews to obtain my data. This form of interview permits the interviewee to lead the interview, allowing for more detailed insight into their experiences and ideas, as well as a more open atmosphere for free exchange of information (Berg 2004). Specifically, I believe in-depth interviews provided the rich data needed to help answer my research questions that cover the sensitive issues involving my participant's construction of gender and sexuality. I also performed ethnographic observations to collect data in support of my research. These observations provided me with the chance to study my subjects in the indie rock environment, see how they interacted with the crowd (especially other men), observe the indie rock lifestyle through the indie rockers' perspective, and experience the atmosphere/subculture that the indie rockers participate in with my own eyes. My participant observations can be classified as "microethnography" because they consisted of me collecting data concerning my subjects at selected indie rock performances rather than observing the indie rock men's entire lifestyle (Berg 2004:150).

I interviewed fifteen men for this research study. I used convenience sampling in order to obtain the first couple of participants needed for my study. After that I used snowball sampling, in which I had my participants supply me with the names and contact information of three other men who might be willing to be interviewed, to acquire the rest of my interviewees. Through friends' and participants' help and my own volition, I contacted my participants through email, phone, and face-to-face interactions, inviting them to be a participant in my study. My sample consisted of thirteen white men and two men of mixed race (white and Hispanic). Their ages ranged from twenty-three to thirty-three years old. All of the men were heterosexual. Thirteen of the men were lead singers in their indie rock bands, and the other two men were the lead guitarists of their bands. All of the men had been playing music for over ten years and most had been avid members of the indie rock scene for the same amount of time, while some had entered the scene later on in their musical careers.

The interviews were conducted at coffee shops, bars, and at three of the participants' residence. All of the interviews lasted approximately an hour to an hour and a half and were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. During the interviews, I used an interview guide that included demographic and essential questions. The interview guide (see appendix 1) was arranged around my two research questions: two sections contained questions regarding how the participants constructed and managed their gender identity, one section contained questions on how they established status in the indie rock scene through their gender identity, and another section asked about advantages and disadvantages that came with resisting masculine norms and maintaining their alternative gender identity. Although there was a structured interview guide, the interviews

themselves were very unstructured, allowing for flexibility in the order of questions and language of the interviews. The interviewees guided the interviews and I used probing questions, such as “how did that make you feel?” These questions were used to gain more detailed responses to my questions and to better understand the participants’ experiences and feelings when it came to certain sensitive topics about their gender.

All of the interviews were transcribed, and pseudonyms were provided for each participant to protect their identity. During transcription, every effort was made to duplicate what the interviewees said in the interview, however, there were some instances where the participant’s voice was inaudible due to background noise or the tape recorder momentarily malfunctioning, and so the reference (“can’t hear” and “?”) was typed into the transcription. Also, I chose to leave out of the transcripts repetitious use of the words “like” and “you know” and the iterations “uhhh” and “ummm.”

After I had transcribed my interviews, I began content analysis on my interviews. First, I used open coding to highlight and write down themes and categories that seemed important in the interviews. Once I was through with open coding, I developed themes that had come up in all or in several of the interviews. After identifying the most prominent themes that related to my study, I went over my interviews again using focused coding in order to identify quotes directly related to my themes. This extensive data analysis method allowed me to find the most relevant and rich information contained in my interviews regarding the issues on gender I am focusing on (Berg 2004).

I conducted five ethnographic observations for the research study as well. These observations were overt in nature because my interview participants knew that I might observe them at their shows, however the observations were also covert in the fact that

the audience/patrons were not aware that I was observing their interactions as well. This observation technique worked well because I was able to freely take written notes while not drawing attention to myself or alienating any of the indie rockers with my behavior. Gaining entrance into the indie rock field was not an issue since the shows I observed were open to the public. My ethnographic process consisted of me attending indie rock shows in which my participants were performing. Once inside the club, bar, or in one case clothing store where the shows were being held, I took mental observations concerning the atmosphere, lighting, decor, sounds, and smells of the environment. I used a small note pad and pen to take down “cryptic jottings” or brief notes of particular quotations said by the lead singers or audience, descriptions of the fashion being worn by the male audience and band members, and observations on how the indie rockers acted on stage and interacted with the crowd (e.g. dancing) (Berg 2004:174). I also made mental notes on how my subjects interacted with fans and friends (especially the men) before and after the show.

After attending the shows, I used my field notes and memory to type up detailed descriptions of my experience (Berg 2004). Once I typed the descriptions, I performed a similar form of content analysis on the observations that I did for my interviews. Through coding I looked for themes and actions in the performance that were similar to the themes found in my interviews. Selected passages from the descriptions are used to further support my findings concerning the indie rock men’s gender performances. My findings provide the experiences of only fifteen men in the indie rock scene and a select number of ethnographic observations. While the indie rockers’ performances, gender

ideals, and identities may be relevant to other social trends in the scene and in society, they are not generalizable to the whole of society.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Five main themes emerged from my interviews and ethnographic observations of indie rock men. The first was the alternative social construction of masculinity the indie rock men created. Included in this theme was how the indie rockers defined “being a man.” The redefinition of homosociality by the indie men was the second theme identified. I found that the men constructed and reaffirmed their alternative gender and sexual identities through interactions with other men and women in the indie rock scene. The third theme was the reconstruction of the indie rock men’s gender identities through the use of both masculinity and femininity. Related to this theme were the participants’ use of masculine characteristics, anti-masculine characteristics, feminine characteristics, and defiance to establish their gender and sexual ideologies. The fourth theme that emerged was the undoing of gender through queer politics by men in the indie rock scene. The data suggest that the respondents reject the binary nature of gender by calling into question the necessity for gender labels, and promoting the diversity of gender and sexuality in order to undo gender and create equality. The last theme applied to the consequences of the men’s alternative gender identity, specifically the advantages and disadvantages that come along with their gender identities.

Alternative Construction of Masculinity

Many of the participants in the study found it problematic to define what it meant

to be a man in today's society. In response to the question of what do you think it means to be a man, Jordan said, "That's the worst question you could ask me (hahaha). I don't know...I wouldn't really call myself a man, so it's kinda hard, cause I've never really felt like a man." There was uncertainty in the men's construction of masculinity. West and Zimmerman (1987) would point out that the men were not conscious of their masculinity, but still upholding the gender order. However, in contrast to West and Zimmerman (1987) and Butler's (2006) research stating that gender identities are influenced and constructed by the normative ideals of society, the indie rock men consciously did not know how to moderate their behavior to the binary gender system.

While some of the characteristics used by the men to define "being a man" were associated with the hegemonic norm, many of the qualities they identified were egalitarian in nature or anti-masculine. Responsibility was an important determinant of masculinity for many of the indie rockers. Corey stated, "You gotta accept responsibility, you gotta stand up." In Western culture, responsibility is normally held by those in power, which are usually men, thus this belief maintained the hegemonic ideal (Connell 2005). Respect for others and understanding were two other important qualities that a majority of the men associated with being a man. Tristan defined the way a man should act as "confident in yourself enough to where you respect other people's ideas, other people's opinions." To the same question Bailey responded, "to be honest and understanding, to be able to communicate well, what you want." Both of these qualities are associated with an egalitarian perspective; therefore, they reject the hegemonic maintenance of inequality upheld by masculinity. Similarly, many of the indie rockers rejected and questioned hypermasculine men and their hegemonic ideals. Frankie stated:

You know, I tell you what I don't like...I'm from Mississippi, right? And I have friends that are in these southern rock bands, that are like real big hair, big beards, and it's very masculine southern rock 'n' roll. And these are my friends, and some of them do the gayest stuff I've ever seen for being a bunch of straight dudes. You know, when I say gay, I mean, I think, it creates the most adverse effect than what they are going for, and it's just like, it's so macho, it's fuckin' ridiculous...I find it to be hiding other things.

Like Frankie, several men I interviewed criticized other men who were hypermasculine. Respondents questioned hypermasculine gender identities, and identified the behavior as deviant and unappealing. The rejection of these "macho" men contrasts with Bird's (1996) research, which argues that social interaction between men develops their gender identities; gender meanings are reinforced or devalued in order to maintain hegemonic masculinity.

Some of the men interviewed also defined the characteristics of a man to be just as valuable for a woman, calling into question the necessity for a distinction among gender characteristics. Bailey stated, "I would say that as far as I'm concerned, I don't really think there is a man and a woman line there. I think gender in general, by definition, could be a male or a female. So I feel like it's all up for grabs really for me." By rejecting the gender divisions maintained by society concerning masculinity, the indie rockers constructed their gender ideology in contrast to the binary system of inequality (Butler 2006; Connell 2005; West and Zimmerman 1987).

Furthermore, all of the respondents mentioned particular influences when constructing their masculinity. A family member, such as a father, mother, uncle, grandfather, or wife was the most common influence on the men. Sociologists define the family as a normative institution that plays a large part in the social construction of an

individual's gender. In general, the family teaches boys and girls the norm gender ideals, therefore reproducing the hegemonic, binary gender system (Connell 2005). While the men acknowledged that these gender norms had influenced them during parts of their lives, many insisted that much of what influenced their gender ideals and identities was due to them learning from their mistakes, their personal intuition, and individual experiences constructed in the indie rock subculture. Logan reveals this when he was asked who taught him how to be a man:

Well I mean, I think that was kinda the whole thing for me, I always felt like I was kinda figuring out a lot of those things on my own. Partially, intentionally, because I think there's like, to a lot of people who like grew up the way I did, very upper middle class, kinda you know, like I grew up...both my parents are physicians. So I grew up in a very sheltered small town, and wanting to be some sort of artist or something like that, I always felt like I had to go out [and] do things on my own, to validate it to myself.

Logan describes how his childhood was based around upper middle class values, with conservative hegemonic norms about men. He talks about his pursuit to discover his own masculinity through interactions outside of his social surroundings. Individuals create their gender identities by learning the correct gender displays through interactions during a situation (West and Zimmerman 1987). By seeking out interaction outside of the norm situations constructed by society, Logan and many of the other men were able to learn new gender displays that affected their masculinity.

A majority of the indie rockers also acknowledged that one or more of the influential men in their lives deviated from the norm ideals of masculinity. They pointed out that these men had challenged them in some positive sense, allowing them to construct new social identities within their masculinity. This was the case for Corey.

When I asked him if he was influenced by any men in the indie scene who were breaking the gender norms, he said:

Oh yeah man, I mean, I'm really influenced by people who are pushing buttons, well like more of an expressive almost freestyle motion...but people that are real flamboyant, really over expression, dramatic, pouring out emotion, I really am influenced by them, and I love when men can push buttons. I don't like it when it's overboard, I like it when its right on the line, subtly, its almost hanging over the edge, just pushing it, knowing how to work it. So I love the people that can walk the line very well.

The men indicated that a portion of the influence concerning their masculinity derives from men who are “flamboyant” and “not necessarily the most masculine.” By identifying with these men, my participants were constructing their gender around identities that “push society’s limitations” and rejecting the hegemonic norms of society. By learning alternative socially shared meanings through gender interactions with these more effeminate men, they have not been strongly influenced by the normative binary gender system. This is parallel to Bird’s (1996) research on male homosociality in that the men’s influences reinforced the shared meanings concerning the maintenance of their masculine ideology. However, the men in my study upheld alternative masculinities as their gender influence rather than the hegemonic norm.

The data suggest that the men identified alternative ways in which they constructed their masculinity and simultaneously upheld some normative beliefs concerning masculinity. In response to how a man should act Frankie said “tough when tough is needed,” and Dylan stated “I’ve always wanted to be maybe not all the time, but to be somewhat of that kind of old school type of like, 1950s sort of man.” By maintaining certain traditional beliefs the men reasserted the hegemonic ideal that upholds divisions in power relations and legitimizes the authority of masculinity. In the

case of some of the men, the use of violence “when necessary” coincides with Bemiller’s (2005) research that identifies violence as a mechanism for men when reasserting their masculinity in society.

Redefining Homosociality in the Indie Rock Scene

Many of my participants reported that their interactions with other men and women in the indie rock scene were influential in constructing their alternative gender and sexual identities. The scene provided them a space to construct their alternative identities freely and be supported by their friends, band mates, and fans. According to Bird (1996), homosociality is “the nonsexual attractions held by men (or women) for members of their own sex” which “promotes clear distinctions between women and men through segregation in social institutions” (121). An important aspect of the indie rock scene was the freedom it allowed for interaction without concern for a social hierarchy (Connell 2005). In response to how he acts around other men, Tristan stated, “when I’m off stage I’m very open, pretty quiet, very soft spoken, just smiling, willing to have a good time, always have open ears.” The indie rock scene provided the men an accepting atmosphere to interact with other men without feeling pressured to uphold any gender norms or hierarchies. For Adrienne, this freedom allowed him to “try to be understanding...[and] just try to be pretty open to other people’s ideas,” because “it kind of keeps you grounded a little bit. It’s nice to have another perspective in things.” Because the homosociality between men in the scene allow them to “be as down to earth as possible,” there is less chance for stigmatization of their alternative gender and more reinforcement of their alternative gender identity. This is in contrast to Bird’s (1996)

research stating that interactions between men are used to construct “socially shared” meanings concerning gender norms in order to reinforce hegemonic masculinity (122).

Some of the indie rockers also reported familial-like interactions with other men in the scene, especially among their band mates. These interactions created strong personal bonds between the indie rockers, providing acceptance and support for their gender identity rather than stigmatization. When describing his interactions with other men, Cameron said, “at it’s best, it’s like an amazing family vacation or something. There’s that sorta brother, sister family vibe.” Sammy acknowledges this statement when he stated:

I mean I guess in a band there’s a little brotherhood that develops, and [it] just becomes...it doesn’t become taboo to have...[to] show your feelings to them (yeah). Even though they’re not family, they are on a mental way I guess.

The close bonds formed by the indie rock men allowed them to be open, express their feelings, and construct their gender freely. Bird (1996) stated in her study that men used emotional detachment in order to resist intimate/meaningful behavior with other men. They maintained the hegemonic gender identity so that they would not be labeled effeminate. Among the indie rock men, intimate behavior was acceptable and welcomed.

All but one of the indie rock men acknowledged that they acted more affectionately with men in the indie rock scene than with men outside of the subculture.

When talking about interactions with other male friends, Jaime stated:

I think that I end up hugging my dude friends a lot more, that are, that are friends not necessarily through the music scene, but are into the same things that I’m into I guess? (Yeah) You know like, they might not be in bands, or they might not go to the same shows that I go to, but we’re

friends, and we're all into like the same music, and we're young and artistic, and just trying to figure things out for ourselves, and smart. I try to; I try to, as much as I can, associate myself with people who are intelligent.

Homosociality among indie rockers allowed for emotional attachment between the men to occur in order to create stronger friendships. Unlike Bemiller's (2005) research on male cheerleaders who acted hypermasculine to maintain the hegemonic norm, the indie rockers interacted freely in effeminate ways without worrying about the possibility of being stigmatized. Because other men in the scene reaffirmed the men in their actions, they were not labeled gender deviants. Many of the men reported instances of hugging and kissing other men as forms of interaction onstage and off. Cameron remembers:

At our last show, he [band mate] kissed this guy on stage to get him off [the stage] and he's done that to me before to (haha). But like it's, like I said, your boundaries are all broken down, and its not like, I don't know, I couldn't even imagine being like "what the fuck dude!?"

The men's actions on stage clearly reject hegemonic heterosexuality (Connell 2005). For some of the men, homoerotic participation was not only a way of showing affection, but also a way of rebelling against the gender norm. In response to whether or not he is more affectionate with indie rock men compared to other men, Dylan stated:

In my experience, it tends to be people who are into indie rock and all the things that go along with it that. They're generally intelligent, creative people that are drawn to things that are little bit outside the norm or whatever. And so I think it [the scene] does forge a lot of close relationships with people...most of the people who are kind of in that scene would prefer to be as like as far away from that kind of macho crap thing as possible...[and] especially with a lot of my good friends, and a lot of this is probably just because we have known each other for years. And there a was a time when we were all doing a lot more drugs and just kind like wanted to do things to be provocative or to be shocking or whatever. Like...guys making out and nudity and [those] things always tended to do

the trick, as far as being provocative and shocking...just kind of trying to push the limit.

This behavior can be identified as what Mimi Schippers (2002) labels “gender maneuvering” because the men are stretching the gender rules of their masculinity. Schippers (2002) reported similar interactions among both the men and women in her study on gender and sexuality in the early 1990s alternative rock scene. She described how women interacted in homoerotic behavior in order to resist the norm and “queer” their sexuality. By “blurring the masculine position,” the alternative rockers (men in particular) were able to undermine male power relations through “intragender erotic play” without being labeled homosexual (Schippers 2002:32, 148). Like the alternative rockers, some of the indie rock men socially interacted with one another in ways outside the gender norm as “a rebellion sorta thing,” challenging the sexual dichotomy enforced by society. Butler (2006) states that when an individual’s gender performance does not coincide with their sex, “dissonance” is formed identifying the “regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence” (187). Therefore the men’s non-normative interactions contrast with the strict gender/sexual dichotomy that West and Zimmerman’s (1987) “doing gender” theory is based on.

Reconstruction of Gender Identity

The indie rock men used both masculine and feminine characteristics when constructing their gender and sexual identities on stage and off. Some of the participants indicated that they used their masculinity to draw attention to themselves. In describing how he uses his masculinity Corey stated:

You know, I mean I’m a monkey stomping in the middle of the freakin’ woods. Beatin’ around screaming, yelling, flexing, making these sounds,

making these beat like sounds, you know. It's the beating of the chest, it's the tiger screams (laughing), it's there, I mean. I very much use that in my performance, to get attention. Fucking grab somebody that ain't lookin,' I want them to look. Cause I'm going to friggin do something to make them look.

The men gained attention among their peers through the use of their physical and vocal power. Their actions correspond with West and Zimmerman's (1987) research on "doing gender." Through intimidation and the threat of violence, the men were identifying with the correct displays of their sex and upholding the gender binary that maintains hegemonic power (Connell 2005; West and Zimmerman 1987).

While some of the men reported playing up their masculine characteristics, many of the men stated that masculinity was not important in the indie rock scene. Logen acknowledged this by stating "It's one of the fewest cultures [indie rock], where like the less masculine you are, the fucking, the more of a man you are." The indie rockers subverted hegemonic gender displays that are a necessary part of the norm masculine identity (Bemiller 2005; Connell 2005). Schippers (2002) would identify the men's beliefs as a form of "gender maneuvering," since they were resisting the gender norms of their sex.

The men also described anti-machismo sentiment when describing how they maintained their identity in the indie rock scene. Dylan stated:

I don't think there's a lot of bravado, machismo that kind of plays into the situation. Yeah I've never felt, as far as other people playing music...I've never felt like that really anybody wanted you to try and impress them or that it was ever terribly competitive.

Corey felt “completely disgusted” by men acting “macho.” Similar to the women in Schippers’ (2002) study, the indie rock men rejected hegemonic masculinity in order to identify the inequality maintained by the norm.

All of my participants reported that they incorporated feminine characteristics when constructing their gender identity. Many of the indie rock men identified some of their physical characteristics as effeminate in nature. Corey comments:

I think especially when I shave and with my long hair, my body type not being hugely muscled, [not] being like a jock and toned, I’d have many guys think that I was a women when I was turned around. You know, so I wear really tight jeans, it shows off my legs, so I’m not this big bulky guy; I’m a more feminine type body style.

Through their appearance, the indie rock men distorted the correct gender and sexual displays maintained by the binary sex system. The men did not maintain the surface politics of the body that are constructed by society (Butler 2006). Schippers (2002) would assert that the men used their body as a way to disrupt the gender/sexual norms. Additionally, Connell (2005) points out that when bodies are open to change (e.g. physically) there is more opportunity for human agency to subvert the gender order.

Some of the indie rockers identified their sense of style (e.g. clothing) as effeminate. From the pants and jackets to the shirts and shoes, the men labeled their fashion as feminine in style, and in some cases wore actual women’s clothing. Corey said:

A lot of where I get my style from is looking at women...that’s where I tend to get a lot of my style. I’ll look at magazines that my girlfriend gets in, and be like “aww that looks good on her, that’ll look good on me.” I’ll be like “those jeans are nice, those jeans will look good on me.” I don’t ever look at men’s clothes, or the way men are dressed.

Dylan also recognized that his effeminate style, “typical indie rock kinda tight clothes,” was a way for indie rockers to identify themselves to other indie rockers, thus inviting more potential listeners to pay attention to their performance.

The styles mentioned above were a common sight for me when I attended the shows of some of my participants. I went to the same club twice to see two different bands. The club had been transformed from a mechanics garage into a downtown rock venue, and had been established for almost two years as the hip new bar for indie rock listeners to come, dance, and listen to bands and DJs. Many of the patrons were men, and while there seemed to be some regulars, the shows brought for the most part different crowds. One thing that did remain constant was the dress code. A majority of the men dressed in skin-tight jeans, in a myriad of colors that stopped or bunched at the ankle because they did not fit over their shoes. The men also wore tight short sleeve shirts, hooded sweatshirts, and cardigans that were bright, colorful, with some displaying graphics that covered the entire piece of apparel. Some of the men wore cowboy boots, while others wore Converse Chuck Taylors and Asics modeled after cheerleading shoes. The men also accessorized with long colorful scarves, derbies, and baseball caps. Combined with their thin bodies and long hair, the men looked quite similar to their women counterparts. If one was to see them from behind, they might have been mistaken for women. Schippers (2002) reported that some of the male musicians in her study adopted “feminine styles, not as parody, but as a stylistic maneuver” (110). The men in Schippers’ (2002) research reported the use of feminine style occasionally in their performance, but my interviews and observations indicate that the men’s dress is worn on and off stage regularly. Schippers (2002) asserts that individuals do gendered dress as a

way of associating their style with the binary sex system. For the men in my study, the use of effeminate style allowed the men to undo gendered dress, placing them in what Schippers (2002) call a “no-man’s-land of gender” allowing them to embrace femininity (111). Butler (2006) reports that some men are able to perform a deviated form of gender through dress; and that dress and bodily displays can be used to blur the gender distinction. In my study, I found that the men blurred their gender through their alternative form of gendered dress.

Along with their dress, the indie rockers indicated that the dancing and singing during their performances were effeminate in style. Bailey acknowledged “I mean, I would definitely describe my dancing style to be more feminine than masculine. But I wouldn’t even know how to describe a masculine dance either.” When I asked whether he uses feminine characteristics to draw attention to himself, Corey reported “with the dance moves, with the slick moves, you know, with the grinding, copying the way women move. That’s the way I try to really do.” In reference to his voice, Jaime stated “my voice is really high when I sing, so it sounds like a chick.”

I attended two shows where the male performers exhibited these gender displays in their performance. One of these occasions I was in the club described earlier. The band consisted of a lead singer who played keyboard and a drummer. A preset sample beat began to thump loudly and the lead singer’s foot began to stomp. When the drummer began to play, the lead singer slammed down on the keys and started in on the lyrics with a high-pitched voice. Throughout the performance, the singer left his keyboard to dance around on the floor. He shook his hips, stomped his feet, waved his hands around, and clapped vigorously with a very sexual overtone. He also humped and grinded the

microphone-stand and banged on a tambourine from time to time. For many of the men in the audience, this was an invitation to join in the fun. Many of the men scooted, jumped, and swayed to the music. There were loud yelps, chirps, and phrases like “love it” directed to the band during the songs. The lead singer and the men danced throughout the forty-five minute set to songs that mimicked an electro beat, but with loud keyboard and guitar sounds, and crashing drums over all of it. One of the lyrics sung by the singer was “we’ll do something embarrassing tonight,” which caused a loud sexual “woo” to be yelled from the crowd. These actions were normalized throughout the crowd for the entire set.

At another show several weeks later, I waited as the band did sound check. The lead singer spoke normally into the microphone in order to check pitch and monitor levels. His hair was down to his shoulders and it parted a little off to the left of his forehead, causing his hair to swoop over his face, leaving it almost unrecognizable. The rest of the band consisted of a drummer with hair longer than the singer’s, a bassist who was tall and skinny, and a lead guitarist with hair down to his earlobes. The singer played both a keyboard and guitar. When the band was finally ready to begin, loud drumbeats began the show, with layers of guitar and keyboard constructing a poppy melody on top. The vocals came in very unexpectedly. They were high in pitch but soft and melodic. The range in the singer’s vocals were on par with that of a woman’s and sounded nothing like the deep, throaty sounds usually identified with male singers in the punk, rock-n-roll, country, and metal music genres that I was accustomed to, causing it to be refreshing in sound. When the lead singer’s hair fell across his face, there were almost no signs to identify his gender, allowing him to construct a genderless sound with his

voice and appearance. The crowd's reaction was to scream out loudly in appreciation with yells of "yeah" and "woo." I regularly saw both women and men singing along with the lyrics of the songs with a smile on their faces. Both of these observations are examples of how the men challenged gender norms, rejecting the binary system's displays of appropriate behavior. The men on stage and on the dance floor socially constructed their sexuality through their performances and overt sexual behavior causing the sexual dichotomy to be distorted. Deutsch (2007) would define the men's actions as undoing gender through performance, because they resisted the norm behavior associated with hegemonic masculinity. The reaction by the male audience members further supported the indie rockers' actions by creating a space where the behavior was the norm. Like the women in Schippers' (2002) study of alternative rockers, the men used feminine actions of the body to disrupt the gender binary, and queer their sexuality in order to question the sexual dichotomy.

Another feminine attribute that played into a majority of the indie rock men's performances concerned their lyrics. In response to how feminine characteristics influenced his actions in the indie rock scene, Morgan stated:

I've been influenced to definitely write certain lyrics that were definitely you know, like definitely had some questionable implications as far as that [feminine] kind of thing... You kind of get inspired to push the envelope a little bit there.

Along with lyrics that call into question the gender of the singer, some indie rockers also wrote lyrics from a woman's point of view. Tristan acknowledged, "I mean I write melodies with a girl singing it in mind. And I think that's awesome. I think that's a really special gift that I've developed, where I can think or write music for a guy or girl."

One such experience I had concerning gender-neutral lyrics occurred during my first participant observation. The dance floor was packed with fans, and so were the surrounding areas and the bar. As the band I had come to see started in on their first song, the overhead lights flashed red, green, and blue. The band consisted of a large number of men and one woman, all playing different instruments, and all dancing around the stage. The lead singer began listing off ideologies like “capitalism” and “feminism.” The chorus stated “believe in your ‘isms’, believe in yourself.” Each time the chorus erupted, both men and women in the crowd screamed the lyrics and clapped along to the beat. Men in the audience were dancing with both women and men, gyrating and groping each other to the music. As the song ended there was an explosion of applause and screaming. The men in the audience were displaying their gender to other men in the crowd by dancing and responding to the lyrics and sound of the music with homoerotic and affectionate interactions. The genderless lyrics provided an anthem for the audience to sing, clap, cheer, and dance to and in the process, reaffirm the singer’s alternative gender identity that he was constructing on stage. In contrast to Bird’s (1996) research on the appropriate behaviors of hegemonic masculinity (e.g. emotional detachment), the men expressed their feelings through music, identifying with effeminate qualities and a feminine identity. The men’s lyrics allowed them to transcend the gender binary and use both gender qualities to construct their alternative gender identity, in effect undoing gender and supporting a feminist consciousness (Deutsch 2007).

Along with their style, performances, and lyrics, respondents indicated that their feminine characteristics allowed them to become more open with their audience (which were primarily composed of men) and be able to freely express their emotions in public.

Dylan stated that indie rock music and his feminine characteristics allows him “to kind of open up and allows you to be...it allows you to show more of yourself than I think I normally would have.” Cameron acknowledged “if sorta leaving myself open emotionally, or show the sensitivity or a willingness to bare all [is] to be considered feminine, I mean that’s the sorta thing that I try and do.” Being open emotionally on stage and off allowed them the ability to not have to “keep up the standards of [masculinity].” The indie rock men created an area of acceptance where one could perform their gender without being forced to comply with the gender dichotomy.

Some of the interviewees pointed out that they used feminine characteristics in their gender performance to challenge norms. Casey stated, “I like going against the grain of what I felt was challenging to people. It’s just like, ‘well live with it’.” In reference to his alternative masculinity and music, Corey asserted:

Some people might confuse it [feminine characteristics] as...being homoerotic kinda, but I’m willing to push that. I’m willing to fuck with your head, if that bothers you. Because I’m here to freakin’ open you up and bash all that shit, and letting me be comfortable with me being me.

The men explicitly used both masculinity and femininity to challenge the norm. The men used their alternative gender performance as a form of gender resistance. This allowed the men to call into question the social norms and undo gender, in order to reduce gender differences (Deutsch 2007).

Undoing Gender with Queer Politics

Several of my participants called into question the necessity of gender in determining their social identity. Jordan stated:

I would like there to be no separation between men and women, as far as how they’re supposed to be viewed. Because I think there’s so many

exceptions to the rule that we should just stop calling them exceptions to the rule. No rules at all, there are just certain people that act a certain way.

For the men, gender was something that had no merit in the social construction of society. The men's statements acknowledged the uncertainty that comes with gender construction in society (Stein and Plummer 1994).

Some of the men also contended that it was hard to construct their gender around a binary sex system. For instance, when I asked how masculinity affects the way he acts, Jessi said:

I keep breaking from the man thing, you know. I think it's just like, all the things that I guess are preconceived notions or these social boundaries or whatever, like how a man should be...I think when it's something good, then it applies to everybody.

According to Valocchi (2005), gender and sexuality are not constructed from simple categories, but rather are part of a complicated social process beyond male, female, heterosexual, and homosexual.

A group of the men also explained that being an indie rock artist provided the opportunity of transcending gender in their performances. Dylan commented:

I've never really viewed it [gender] like that. Because I think a lot...I separate what I do musically from what I do just as a person in my day-to-day life. Because I think you...if you're doing something for the sake of art, I think you can be anything, for the sake of art.

The men's artistic lifestyle allowed them to reject the norm masculine identity, and resist the need to "conflate it with the broad range of gender and sexual practices" (Valocchi 2005:767).

Many of the indie rock men remarked on the necessity for both male and female qualities in the construction of one's gender identity. Tristan believes that "one day we're just gonna slowly move more and more towards some unisex, like I don't know, brown like, the complete melting pot of ethnicities and gender." Sammy thinks it's "healthier to have a knapsack of both masculinity and femininity." The indie rockers' ideals concerning gender draw attention to Valocchi's (2005) belief that social identities maintain abnormal intersections between sex, gender, and sexuality. A combination of these intersections is needed for the construction of a more equal social identity.

Some of the men's physical androgyny also called into question the gender binary process of social construction. Jaime referred to a time when a bystander referred to him as "the poster child for the future, like where things should be headed" because he looked "so ambiguous." Like Lucal (1999), Jaime maintains a gender non-conformist identity through his abnormal gender displays represented through his body. However, unlike Lucal (1999), he does not let himself be misinterpreted. This allows him to call into question the gender dichotomy, and for some theorists like Valocchi (2005), this is a form of queer activism.

Consequences of Alternative Gender Identity

Respondents acknowledged several advantages of having alternative gender identities. Some of the participants indicated that masculinity could be used as an advantage in the indie rock scene. According to Jaime, one of the advantages to being masculine is that:

You get taken more seriously (yeah), I mean yeah. I'm...nothing against what everybody else is doing, but I definitely think that the people who are running the shows and who are booking the shows...like it seems like you don't get pushed around as much.

The indie men recognized an advantage to being masculine in the “business aspect” of the subculture. This ideal upholds the hegemonic belief, concerning masculine abilities, that men are more equipped to deal with business transactions (Connell 1995). It also reinforces Bird’s (1996) research on the use of competition by men. Through competition in booking shows (business aspect) the men signified their masculinity and maintained their dominant position in the artist subculture.

However, many of the men also reported that having feminine characteristics created advantages for them. For example, Tristan said, “if masculinity was acting like, like I said raw emotion, then the female part would be thinking...To be able to hone into that feminine sort of idea...that adds so much more to your perceptions.” The men are performing agency, through the use of feminine characteristics, allowing for the construction of a more egalitarian gender ideology (Deutsch 2007).

Another advantage the men reported was the overwhelming support of the audience for their alternative gender actions on stage. Corey commented:

Wearing tight jeans, and the dance moves, and the grinding, and getting them all hot and bothered...I think they appreciate that...I think what it is, is a thinning of the air, in that room. I’m allowing you to open yourself up, because I’m the central point, and I’m so open, that you could pretty much be yourself in that room.

The men concluded that the audience reaffirmed their alternative gender identity as acceptable. Men were not stigmatized and labeled effeminate for engaging in actions outside the masculine norm (Bemiller 2005). The approval of the audience allowed the men to resist hegemonic masculinity. Through socially shared meanings between the indie rockers and their audience, the men were socially reinforced to undo their masculinity and construct non-normative gender identities (Bird 1996).

A majority of the indie rockers identified qualities of openness and acceptance among their friends and audience when performing their gender on stage and off. Jordan believed his gender identity allowed, “more people [to] relate to you” since he was seen as more “open minded.” In reference to the indie community and his feelings of acceptance, Morgan stated “once you get to a place where you have that kind of community and see it around you, you start to feel like ‘awww this is paying off’.” The indie rock scene provided a space for the men to perform their alternative gender and undo masculinity in order to create a more egalitarian experience and subculture (Bird 1996; Deutsch 2007). The men’s alternative gender identity was accepted by both men and especially women, “women love it,” reaffirming the men’s heterosexuality and allowing for the blurring of sexuality (Schippers 2002).

All except for one of the men reported stigmatization due to their alternative gender identity. Much of the abuse was through comments questioning their sexuality by men outside of the indie rock scene, strangers on the street, or audience members unfamiliar with indie rock music. Being referred to as “gay,” “fag,” or “queer” were all forms of stigma that the men had experienced at one time or another. Men who rejected other forms of masculinities applied stigma to the indie rocker's alternative masculinity in order to maintain the hegemonic gender ideologies of society and control non-normative behavior (Connell 2005). In particular, the homophobic comments and ridicule about their non-masculine social identities are a method to force the indie rockers back into the traditional masculine ideal (Bemiller 2005). However, the men I interviewed did not react to the stigma by acting out in a hypermasculine way (“saving face”); rather, they questioned the masculinity of those who enforced the stigma upon them and used the

stigma as motivation in constructing their alternative gender (Bemiller 2005). When I asked about any experiences of antagonism or abuse, Tristan said:

Just because it's [gender identity and music] on a feminine level and they're not ready for that. I mean that happens so much...I hate it...[and] I ate it up. Well immediately you feel defeated...But, at the same time it fuels the fucking fire (yeah). Your words, your hate, only makes me stronger you know...Someone's gotta do it because the worlds about equality of everything.

For the other men, the stigma “affirmed” what they were doing, while some, took the emasculating experience as a compliment. Dylan remembers “I guess these guys were kinda, what’s the word, [trying to] emasculate me (yeah) in a way. They were telling me that I was ‘gorgeous’ and...But at the time, I was going out, and I kind of took it as a compliment.” In reaction to the stigma, the men actively called into question the gender norms in an effort to create social change. The men questioned the people’s actions to reform their behavior by identifying them as discriminatory acts, and resisted the normalization process by ridiculing the stigma practices (Schippers 2002). Valocchi (2005) might call the indie men’s behavior a form of radical activism.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the indie rock men construct alternative forms of masculinity in the scene, redefine homosocial interactions throughout the indie scene, reconstruct their gender identities to maintain both masculine and feminine characteristics, undo gender through their alternative gender ideals and performances, and deal with the social consequences of their alternative gender identity. My findings highlight that the construction of masculinity was an uncertain process. Paradoxically, while the men upheld some hegemonic beliefs concerning masculinity consciously and unconsciously, more frequently they emphasized the use of egalitarian and anti-hegemonic values when constructing their masculinity. The men were also influenced by some hegemonic masculine norms that were internalized through societal institutions, like family (Connell 2005). However, they were more affected by their own initiatives to search out alternative gender displays, and with regard to the construction of their alternative masculinity, were influenced by men who displayed more effeminate gender identities.

My findings show that when interacting with other people (especially men) in the indie rock scene, the men felt free to construct their alternative gender identities through socially shared meanings that did not uphold the hegemonic norm (Bird 1996). The indie rockers constructed a familial atmosphere among their friends, band mates, and fans,

allowing them to maintain emotional attachment and engage in intimate behavior without being stigmatized. The men interacted in behavior on stage and off in order to show affection/friendship, undermine the rules of masculinity, and challenge the norm power relations of gender and sexuality (Connell 2005; Schippers 2002). Their gender performances also allowed them to call into question the gender and sexual dichotomies maintained when doing gender and sexuality (Bemiller 2005; Butler 2006; West and Zimmerman 1987). Only one of my participants did not feel connected to the indie rock subculture.

When constructing their gender identity on stage and off the men used characteristics of both masculinity and femininity. Some of the men engaged in masculine activities in order to draw attention to themselves, thus “doing gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987). Yet, the interviewees reported that masculinity was unimportant in the indie rock scene and some even criticized any behavior thought of as hypermasculine or “macho.” Respondents resisted hegemonic norms that men in other contexts use to construct their gender identity (Bemiller 2005; Bird 1996; Connell 2005; Schippers 2002). All of the indie rockers incorporated feminine characteristics into the process of constructing their gender identity. Through their physically androgynous features, fashion, actions on stage (dancing and singing), and lyrics, the men distorted their gender and sexual displays, calling into question the hegemonic norms (Bemiller 2005; Bird 1996; Butler 2006; Connell 2005; West and Zimmerman 1987). The indie rockers also disrupted the gender/sexual binary through their body politic and performances on stage (Butler 2006; Schippers 2006). In addition, the men’s blurring of the gender/sexual distinction in their lyrics allowed them to undo rather than do gender

and support a feminist consciousness (Deutsch 2007; Schippers 2002; West and Zimmerman 1987). With few exceptions, the respondents reported that the use of feminine qualities in the construction of their gender identity allowed them to be more emotionally open with their friends and audience and challenge the norms of society. They rejected the hegemonic behavior of being emotionally detached, and openly resisted the gender/sexual binary in order to question the social norms and undo gender in hopes of reducing gender differences (Bemiller 2005; Bird 2006; Deutsch 2007; Schippers 2002).

Several of the indie rockers also called into question the need for gender as a factor in the construction of their social identities (Stein and Plummer 1994; Valocchi 2005). These men maintained the queer politics of gender and sexuality when they rejected the gender/sexual binary, transcended gender through artistic license, and called for the necessity of multiple and diverse gender attributes in order to construct an egalitarian gender identity (Valocchi 2005). Their actions and ideals allowed them to identify the problems that occur due to a gender binary and actively resist/undo the hegemonic gender and sexual norms, sometimes even through their appearance (Deutsch 2007; West and Zimmerman 1987).

My study also found that most of the indie rockers experienced positive and negative consequences due to their alternative gender identity. They reported that masculinity could be used as an advantage when dealing with the business aspects of indie rock, which upheld the hegemonic norms concerning behaviors in business (Connell 2005). However, the men asserted that more advantages occurred due to incorporating feminine attributes into their gender identity. Among the advantages were

the construction of a more egalitarian gender ideology, audience appreciation, and friends and fans' acceptance, especially from women, of their music and alternative gender identity. These advantages allowed the men to undo their masculinity and construct their alternative gender identity based on egalitarian beliefs rather than differences, without the fear of being stigmatized (Bemiller 2005; Deutsch 2007). The interviewees also acknowledged that they experienced negative reactions due to their alternative gender identities, through the use of stigma (Bemiller 2005). This included homophobic statements and comments that criticized their non-masculine identities, which are common methods to force men to maintain the hegemonic norms of masculinity (Bemiller 2005). However, many of the participants stated they used the stigma as motivation for reinforcing their alternative gender identity beliefs. The men actively questioned those who stigmatized them, referring to their acts as discriminatory, and reaffirmed their alternative gender behavior as a way to create social change through activism (Schippers 2002; Valocchi 2005).

The implications of my findings provide mixed outcomes on alternative methods of constructing and undoing gender. The indie rock men reinforced some hegemonic gender norms in their gender displays, interactions, and identities, which identifies with previous research on men doing gender (Bemiller 2005; Bird 1996; Butler 2006; Connell 2005; Kendall 2000; West and Zimmerman 1987). However, the participants in my study appeared to create alternative gender identities, displays, performances, and ideologies that were in contrast to the hegemonic gender/sexual binaries that are based on sex differences. This paradox in the men's' deconstruction of gender calls into question the restrictive nature of the sexual and gender binaries, and provides an example of how

gender is more complex and susceptible to change. I believe these contradictions and my participants' use of human agency allowed them to undo their gender, undermining the hegemonic gender order, and creating a more egalitarian and un-oppressive space for men and women to interact and construct their gender. The egalitarian space is what Kroska (2001) calls a gender subculture in the indie rock scene, which was supported by the men's friends, fans, and audience. I should clarify that while the men were undoing gender in the indie rock scene, patriarchy remained intact in the overall society. While patriarchy remains the dominant form of gender/oppression throughout society, the indie rock men's use of human agency provides one example of how to collectively subvert the gender order and construct a space in society based more on equality.

Much of what the interviewees' alternative gender identities are based on is equality, open-mindedness, and the ability to relate to men who are more effeminate in their lifestyle. The indie rockers in my study believe in one way or another that they are "gender nonconformists," but unlike Lucal (1999), they see their identities as a success. Overall, the strategies the indie rock men used to construct gender provide new ideas on how gender roles can be constructed based on equality, instead of gender differences. These more egalitarian gender identities might also provide for more open relationships among and between women and men. By exhibiting a feminist consciousness through their gender identities and performance on stage and off, the indie artists might be encouraging more men to reject the gender order that maintains discrimination, sexual objectification, subordination, and violence as the norm. Butler (2006) wrote:

In a sense, all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; 'agency,' then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on the repetition. If the rules governing signification not only restrict, but enable the assertion of alternative domains of cultural

intelligibility, i.e., new possibilities for gender that contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms, then it is only with the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible (198).

For the indie rock men, their constant alternative gender performances on stage and off with friends and cycle of new audiences to perform for might allow for the repetition needed to subvert the gender binary in the indie rock subculture.

I must emphasize that my study was based on a limited sample size and number of ethnographic observations so the themes I identified are not representative of the entire male population of the indie rock scene. Nor can my conclusions be generalized to the entire population of men in the United States. My sample reflects the experiences and actions of a select group of men in a certain space of the overall indie rock scene. More interviews should be conducted to allow for a broader spectrum of ideas and experiences held by men in the indie rock scene. Additionally, men of different race and ethnic backgrounds need to be interviewed, to provide a more multicultural understanding of how male indie rockers construct and display gender. Ethnographic observations in other regions of the United States should be conducted in order to better define the other features and experiences the indie rock subculture might create that influence the gender construction of its members.

Further research should be conducted on how men in other contexts do or undo gender. Other settings where men might undo gender are in the art (paint and sculpture) world, environmental movements, and male fashion industry. These areas allow men to be creative and socially active for causes that are deemed feminine or un-masculine by society. Furthermore, several questions need to be answered that were not resolved in my study. Are the men constructing what Connell (2005) defined as a “protest masculinity”

or something else (112)? Because these men are “in the spotlight” on stage, and are potential role models for other male indie rock fans, how influential are these men on other men in the scene? What are women’s reactions, beliefs, feelings, and experiences with these men and their alternative gender identities? What effect do these alternative identities have on the men’s mental health? Lastly, are the men’s alternative masculinities creating more equal relationships with women and men? A glimpse of social change is observed in the indie rockers construction of an alternative gender lifestyle. I believe this study emphasizes the idea that masculinity is more complex and less dualistic, and that there are new forms of masculinity and gender performances being constructed by men for more egalitarian purposes. I believe men should not need to be defined by masculinity but rather by what they intelligently and creatively construct as human beings.

APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Background

1. How old are you?
2. When did you start playing music?
3. How long have you been playing music?
4. When did you get into indie rock music?
5. What drew you to this type of music?
6. How does the music make you feel?
7. Describe how indie music and the scene have influenced your lifestyle?

Creating Gender

8. Tell me what you think it means to be a man?
9. Who taught you how to be a man? Any particular experiences stand out?
10. As a man, how would you define the way a man should act?
11. What are some experiences you have had that have influenced the way you act as a man?
12. I have observed that some men in the indie rock scene have deviated from the socially acceptable idea of being a man (for example. Wearing make-up, tight clothes, expressing their emotions openly, and performing sexual gestures towards their other male friends). Do you feel that these men have influenced you as a man?
13. Any experiences in particular?
14. Can you think of any experiences where your ideas on how a man should act were challenged by these men in the indie rock scene? How did that make you feel?
15. As a man, how do you feel these men's actions/lifestyle have influenced your lifestyle in and out of the indie rock scene?

Managing Gender

16. As a man in the indie rock scene, how do you act around other men in the scene?
17. I have observed in the indie scene that men are more affectionate towards each other than with men outside of the scene. Is this true for you? Do you have any examples/experiences of this?
18. As a man, do you think that masculinity is important in the indie rock scene?
19. As a man, do you feel that your masculinity influences the way you act (around others)?
20. Can you think of any experiences that stick out?

21. I've noticed some men in the indie scene display feminine characteristics along with their masculine characteristics. Do you feel that you have any feminine characteristics?
22. Do you feel that femininity influences how you act as a man?
23. Have these feminine characteristics influenced you (experiences)?
24. As a man, how have these feminine characteristics influenced the way you act/lifestyle in the indie rock scene? Examples?

Establishing Status

25. As a man, how does your masculinity influence you as an artist?
26. Do you use your masculinity to draw attention to yourself? Examples?
27. Do you use any feminine characteristics to draw attention to yourself? Examples?
28. One of my observations about the indie scene is that it focuses on defying the socially accepted rules of music and culture. How do you feel about the scene?
29. Do you feel you use your masculinity as well as music to defy society?

Advantages and/or Disadvantages with New Masculinity

30. As a man in the indie rock scene, are there any advantages that come with being masculine?
31. Do you feel there are any advantages to having feminine characteristics along with your masculinity (in the scene, e.g.)?
32. Have you experienced any ridicule/antagonism/negativity/abuse do to your masculinity? Do to your feminine characteristics? Any experiences? How did it make you feel?
33. Have you experienced any positive/reaffirming/enjoyable experiences? Examples?

Conclusion

34. What is your ideal definition of a man?
35. What would be your ideal indie rock show (new or old)?
36. Would you call yourself a feminist?

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