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# “A Situation Where There Aren’t Rules”: Unwanted Sex for Gay, Bisexual, and Questioning Men

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**Abstract:** Although college gay and bisexual men report elevated rates of sexual victimization, their accounts have received less scholarly attention. This article examines 18 gay, bisexual, and questioning (GBQ) men’s narratives about their experiences of unwanted sex in college. Our findings suggest that men are motivated to have unwanted sex while trying to navigate ambiguous sexual scripts amid male power dynamics, sexual inexperience, and ubiquitous heteronormativity and homophobia. Due to less defined sexual scripts and/or inexperience, men sometimes overlaid a heterosexual script onto encounters, resulting in an expectation that the “top” should have an orgasm. The stigma of being gay (or its potential) also entered into sexual interactions, pushing people to have sex in secrecy, in remote locations, or with closeted people who use force or threats to obtain sex. Together, these gendered and homophobic social pressures combine to leave GBQ men grappling with a double bind. As part of this double bind, GBQ men feel pressure to have sex in order to perform properly as a man—and specifically as a gay or bisexual man. They also fear losing control in a sexual situation, which could result in emasculation.

**Keywords:** unwanted sex; GBQ men; college campuses

ALTHOUGH the sociocultural #MeToo movement has shed light on many aspects of sexual violence, the majority of the victims in the spotlight of #MeToo are women, and their stories primarily involve heterosexual encounters. These public narratives obfuscate stories that do not map as neatly onto predominant conceptions of sex and violence. Extant sociological literature is similarly lacking in its attention to sexual victimization among populations that are not heterosexual women. In this article, we seek to fill a necessary gap and interrogate dominant notions of violence, gender, and sexuality by studying unwanted sex among gay, bisexual, and questioning (GBQ) college men. By focusing on GBQ men, this article seeks to rigorously and conceptually extend our understanding of gender and sexual scripts. Although the sexual scripting literature essentially highlights how scripts constrain and shape behavior, it leaves unresolved what happens when these gendered sexual scripts are unknown. This makes GBQ men a strategic research site for studying this question.

Sexuality-and-violence scholars understand unwanted sex as occurring along a continuum, ranging in severity from unwanted sexual touching to verbal coercion, sexual intercourse through physical force, threats of force, or incapacitation (Kavanaugh 2015; Muehlenhard et al. 2016). Research in recent decades suggests that men who identify as GBQ on college campuses report rates of sexual assault and unwanted sex that mirror those documented among heterosexual women (Dijulio et al. 2015; Ford and Soto-Marquez 2016; Mellins et al. 2017; Muehlenhard et al.

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
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2016). This means as many as 1 in 5 GBQ men will experience sexual assault by the end of college and more than 50 percent will experience some form of unwanted sex. Compared to women, GBQ men may be less likely to acknowledge an unwanted sexual event because of broader homophobia and cultural notions that men are supposed to be able to protect themselves (Hirsch et al. 2019; Turchik 2012; Weiss 2010).

In this article, we explore how it is that young GBQ men come to have unwanted sex and how they understand these events. We argue that unwanted sex happens in several ways that relate to sexual scripts, masculinity, and homophobia. First, we find evidence that GBQ men, in the absence of clear scripts, tended to pull from broader assumptions about gay men's sexuality or to reproduce heteronormative scripts—including the feminization of "bottoms"—which resulted in pressure to have sex and/or ensure a partner's orgasm. Second, when GBQ men found themselves with a man whom they perceived to be more masculine (e.g., by size, strength, status, etc.), they sometimes had unwanted sex if they believed the other man was "owed" sex or to avoid the possibility of violent escalation. Third, many GBQ respondents feared being "outed" or insulted for reasons rooted in homophobia and marginalization. As a result, they sometimes went along with sex to avoid these outcomes.

## Background

Most literature on gender, masculinity, and sexual violence has sought to explain why men are sexually violent toward women, positing a link between masculinity and aggression (Connell 1995; Weiss 2010). However, a growing body of work finds that the same hegemonic ideals of masculinity can push heterosexual men to have unwanted and/or nonconsensual sex with women (Ford 2018; French, Tilghman, and Malebranche 2015; Katz and Tirone 2010; Struckman-Johnson, Struckman-Johnson, and Anderson 2003). Studies also show that all men (heterosexual and otherwise) struggle with identifying as victims, a reluctance that is rooted in hegemonic understandings of men as sexual instigators (Hirsch et al. 2019; Weiss 2010) and the precarious nature of manhood, which is challenged by powerlessness, victimhood, and associations with femininity.

Along these lines, scholars have long understood that many aspects of sexuality are socially constructed. Sexual scripts (Gagnon and Simon 1973) govern "appropriate" sexual behavior and act as roadmaps in the labeling of sexual acts and sexual violence (Carpenter 2001; Hlavka 2014; Morrison et al. 2015). Within this framework, sexuality is not driven by innate biological imperatives so much as it is learned through external sources such as media portrayals, enacted with others, and internalized as truth. In a world governed by compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980), many sexual roadmaps are grounded in heterosexual encounters, in which men and women are understood as oppositional yet complementary pursuers and gatekeepers (Gagnon and Simon 1973; Muehlenhard et al. 2016). In this controlling image, men are constructed as constantly wanting sex, whereas their partners (women) are expected to manage and fulfill men's desires. Scholars argue that the predominance of these heteronormative scripts can make it seem like queer sex

is lacking in sexual scripts (e.g., Power, McNair, and Carr 2009; Seidman 2005), yet more research is needed to explore how such a perceived absence might affect outcomes.

Like sexuality, gender is also not a given but something learned, enacted, and achieved (Lorber 2003; West and Zimmerman 1987). From this perspective, men act in certain ways because it is "normal" and socially legible to act this way. Extensive research finds that expectations for "doing gender" transfer into sexual contexts, in which men are pressured to perform masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Eguchi 2009; Ford 2018). Hegemonic ideals position "real manhood" as antithetical to femininity, strong and dominating, heterosexual, and in need of constant upkeep (Connell 1995; Pascoe 2007; Vandello and Bosson 2013). Whereas womanhood is often understood as natural and unwavering, manhood is something one must actively work to become in a way that is impermanent and uncertain (Vandello and Bosson 2013). This notion of manhood as a tenuous, problematic status has been continuously demonstrated across studies, disciplines, and cultures (Gilmore 1990).

Men who do not conform to masculine ideals experience subordination and marginalization. A subordinated masculinity is one that lacks qualities of hegemonic masculinity instead expressing oppositional traits (e.g., emotional sensitivity) or stereotypically feminine characteristics (e.g., dependency) (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Gay masculinity is generally considered a subjugated masculinity, although there are certain ideals of masculinity that are exalted over others in the gay community (Clarkson 2007; Connell 1995). For instance, sexual "tops" are associated with more masculine characteristics such as height, muscularity, and power, whereas sexual "bottoms" are marginalized, feminized, and associated with lower status in the gay community and, more broadly, in society (Moskowitz and Hart 2011). Bridging these theories of doing gender and subordinated masculinities, we anticipate that if someone is labeled as a bottom in a pair, this then creates expectations of submission. In other words, because many people have a concept that bottoms are submissive, if a man then reveals a preference to be a bottom, an openness to it, or has "bottomed" before, then what is expected is a submissive masculinity, which in and of itself can facilitate submission and unwanted sex.

Research also shows that when experiences or actions challenge one's perceived manhood (i.e., dominant forms of masculinity), men respond with feelings of anxiety (Dahl, Vescio, and Weaver 2015) and may react with thoughts and behaviors that exemplify stereotypical masculinity (e.g., Glick et al. 2007). Specifically, if manhood is "challenged," some men respond with heightened aggression, sexist attitudes, and homophobia (Bosson et al. 2012). Although less research has focused on GBQ men's masculinity, some research suggests that gay men overcompensate in response to hegemonic ideals by seeking muscularity through exercise, maintaining an active sexual life with multiple partners, avoiding feminine presentation, or participating in physically dominating behaviors, such as sports (Anderson 2002; Connell 1995; Eguchi 2009). Research also shows that gay men who experience threats to their masculinity report a desire to distance themselves from feminine gay men and associate with traditionally masculine men (Hunt et al. 2016).

In what follows, we explore how gendered and homophobic social pressures combine to leave GBQ men grappling with a double bind, which is distinct from

the Madonna-whore dichotomy described by heterosexual women. A double bind refers to a situation that encourages GBQ men to have sex in one way but discourages or punishes them for sex in another way. In this double bind, GBQ men feel compelled to take advantage of sexual opportunities in order to be viewed as sexual (and therefore masculine), gain sexual experience in the gay and/or bisexual community, and satisfy the perceived expectations of a partner. Yet, GBQ men also fear that losing control in a sexual situation can result in emasculation. Therefore, they sometimes wish to avoid sex. In navigating this balance, GBQ men seek to reconcile a desire for sexual competence with a simultaneous pressure to avoid emasculation. As a result, GBQ men sometimes describe unwanted sex as an event that challenges their understanding of their gender and their sexuality.

## Data and Method

In-depth interviews were conducted from 2015 to 2017 with 18 GBQ men at a private university in the Northeast who reported unwanted sex. Men comprised 42 percent of approximately 20,000 undergraduates. The study received institutional review board approval at this institution from July 2015 to July 2018. To identify men who had unwanted sex with men, two recruitment strategies were used: (1) Men who reported experiencing unwanted sex in a screening survey conducted in two introductory sociology courses were recruited for a follow-up interview. (2) Recruitment flyers were placed around campus. These flyers read, "Unwanted Sex—Wanna Talk About It? Be part of a study and get paid \$25 for your participation in an interview." In smaller print, the flyers had more detail on confidentiality and eligibility criteria (age 18 to 25 years, current or recent enrollment at the university where the flyers were posted, with experience of unwanted sex in college).

For those men recruited through the screening survey, five questions on an in-class survey taken verbatim from the Online College Social Life Survey (Armstrong, England and Fogarty 2012) were used to identify GBQ men who had had unwanted sex. These included: (1) Since you started college, (1) have you had sexual intercourse that was physically forced on you? (2) Has someone tried to physically force you to have sexual intercourse, but you got out of the situation without having intercourse? (3) Has someone had sexual intercourse with you that you did not want when you were drunk, passed out, asleep, drugged, or otherwise incapacitated? (4) Have you had sexual intercourse that you did not want because someone verbally pressured you? (5) Have you ever performed oral sex or hand stimulation of a partner to orgasm mainly because you didn't want to have intercourse? Men taking the survey who said "yes" to one of these questions and indicated that at least one unwanted experience was with a man in a subsequent question were considered eligible. Men recruited via the flyers completed an abbreviated version of the survey before the interview to determine how they would characterize their unwanted sexual experience.

Of men interviewed, seven were recruited from the in-class survey and 11 were recruited from campus flyers. The average age was 20 years. Eleven men identified as white, three identified as Asian, two identified as black, one identified as Latino, and one identified as mixed race. Five respondents identified as bisexual, 11

identified as gay, and two identified as questioning. No men described scenarios in which they were the "top" only. Instead, most accounts ( $n = 11$ ) included receptive anal sex ("bottoming"). Three accounts included both penetrative and receptive sex, and four included performing unwanted oral sex.

Ten of the interviews were conducted in person (by the first author), and eight interviews were conducted by trained undergraduate research assistants. Given the sensitive subject matter, the first 10 minutes of interviews were spent trying to build rapport. This involved assuring men that the interviews were completely confidential, asking questions about their social lives, and generally trying to make them feel comfortable. We found that most men were eager to talk about their experiences and that the first author's difference in age and gender and the social proximity of student researchers were not barriers to frank, open conversations. Interviews ranged from 34 to 95 minutes (49 minutes on average).

All interviews were recorded digitally, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using Atlas.ti. Our coding scheme emerged inductively when interviews were first carefully read for key concepts (Charmaz 2014). Next, key concepts were used to develop central codes for the data. All interviews were repeatedly scanned and coded for emergent themes on the basis of these codes. Through this process, initial codes generate broader themes, which are grounded in the data.

During interviews, respondents were asked explicitly about how the unwanted sexual event unfolded, how they felt about the event, and what made this experience unwanted. These experiences ranged from encounters that would be classified as rape or sexual assault (completed nonconsensual anal intercourse involving force or incapacitation) to encounters in which the men felt internalized pressure to go through with a sexual act, usually receiving anal intercourse or giving oral sex, even if a male partner did not overtly pressure them. To ensure confidentiality, we use pseudonyms for all participants and have removed any identifying information. In the next section, we will review the findings. The interviews revealed three primary themes that illustrate the social processes leading to unwanted sex: less defined sexual scripts, markers of men's dominance, and effects of homophobia. We argue that these themes illustrate distinct ways that masculinity, sexual scripts, and heteronormativity shape GBQ men's sexual encounters in ways that ultimately render them vulnerable to unwanted sex.

## Results

### *Less Defined Sexual Scripts*

The first theme that emerged across interviews relates to a lack of cultural roadmaps. We found consistent evidence that sexual scripts for GBQ men are less defined than for heterosexuals, and that this was particularly pronounced when gay sexual experiences were new. In many instances, GBQ men described not necessarily knowing what to expect in man-on-man sexual encounters not only because they had little experience with same-gender encounters but also because the "rules" and/or expectations were not clearly defined. For GBQ men who had "come out" recently, unwanted sex sometimes occurred during a trial-and-error period when

men did not yet know how to decline sex with men. Some respondents explained that there had been no other gay men at their high school. As a result, when they did seek out encounters with men in college, these GBQ men were less sure of what was normal or expected. Whereas heterosexual romance and sex receives ample representation in media, there is a dearth in culturally learned sexual scripts for queer people (Hirsch and Khan 2020; Power et al. 2009; Seidman 2005). In some instances, a lack of established sexual scripts led GBQ men to draw on heterosexual scripts or assumptions around gay men's sexuality, using stereotypes about men and the gay community to navigate a situation. The GBQ men we interviewed often made comments such as:

*I don't think he acted maliciously. I don't think he realized how intimidated I was. I think it was more, "Here's a guy who responded to my ad; here's this attractive young guy." Maybe... he was excited to have someone younger and attractive there. I don't think it was malicious. I think if I said I wasn't into it, he would have stopped, but I felt pressured just off the situation. Less so what he said to me, and more along the lines of the situation at hand, which is what made me go through with it.*

–Taylor, 20-year-old junior (gay)

Taylor describes an event in which a partner is intimidating. In these cases, we probed for what behavior "going through with it" referred to. Taylor told us that he bottomed in anal intercourse. He emphasizes that his partner did not act maliciously. Instead, the situation made him have sex, suggesting that certain expectations are built into an encounter. Perhaps his partner assumed from Taylor's response to his ad (on Craigslist) that sex would happen. Research shows that hegemonic understandings position men as always wanting sex (Connell 1995; Gagnon and Simon 1973). As a result, both men may assume that sex is the default option given "the situation" at hand.

In many instances, inexperience combined with GBQ men's reported lack of a clear guide to facilitate unwanted sex. That is, even among GBQ men who had previously had sex with men, many described not having a roadmap or a set of expectations for how to navigate sexual encounters and stay safe. For example, one respondent describes learning to understand the signal of a drink early in college, saying, "When someone buys me a drink, that's when I get a bit nervous. I've been lucky, though, where the guys have explicitly told me... that I didn't owe them anything... been times where I could see how it could have been like I owe them something before they say I don't." Women in college describe a similar uncertainty that men sometimes play on in order to obtain sex (Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney 2006). Often, GBQ men would come to rely on a set of friends to give them advice about how to navigate sexual encounters to avoid negative outcomes. As time went by in college, GBQ men would make other GBQ friends, who would alert them to unsafe scenarios or places, but until this happened, they were at higher risk for unwanted sex.

Below, Joe describes having unwanted receptive anal sex outside a bar with a stranger.

*I don't know how it happened, but we had sex outside my apartment building where you take out the trash in the back. I don't know how that started. It wasn't really ending, me saying, "Let's not do this here." He kept saying, "No, I can make you feel good," kind of persisted. I would get up and try to walk away, and he'd be like "no, no..." When we were walking [after], he talked to me like normal. I adopted the idea that if he wasn't apologizing, then it wasn't weird. I hadn't hooked up before, so I didn't know what to expect. Deep down, I knew that's not how it was supposed to go.*

–Joe, 20-year-old junior (gay)

Although Joe's inexperience may have contributed to the unwanted encounter, he also recalled an uncertainty of expectations. The sex became forceful at times, but afterward, his aggressor acted "normal." He imagined that his partner would apologize if something were wrong. Because he did not have a clear guide for how the encounter should unfold, Joe continued to gauge the situation to see whether everything was okay. In the end, it seemed from the man's behavior that nothing was "weird." Yet, he was left thinking that something was not right.

In some instances, GBQ men did not realize that they were lacking a script until they were midway into a situation. When Chris described an encounter that culminates in unwanted oral sex with another closeted man at a nearby state university, he recalled thinking that he did not know why this man was acting this way.

*He locked the door and put this dresser in front of the door. We went on this bed and started to make out. . . . Anyway, he was like, "No seriously, you can't tell anybody." . . . He threw me around and was grabbing me and menacing me. . . . I don't know why he did this. I mean, I do know why, he got carried away...you know how during sexual interactions, sometimes people will take on their gender role even more fiercely...he was doing that. . .*

He was asked: How do you think you guys both being men affected the dynamic?

*I think it made violence a lot more pragmatic. When it's like, "No, you listen to me," there's a violence in it when a guy does that. I think if it had been two women...I don't know, I'm sure there's a million outliers. ...I don't feel like a woman would ever grab another woman's throat. . .*

He was asked: Did it ever get scary?

*For like one minute maybe. But I was never gonna call to other people. It was never that bad. . . . I wasn't thinking, "How can I get out of this room? How can I get out of this situation?"*

–Chris, 19-year-old sophomore (bisexual)

In the interview, he said the door was barricaded with a dresser and his throat was being grabbed. Chris suggested that women would not use violence in this way.

The presence of a rape script might make the entire scenario terrifying if it happened with a heterosexual pair (Harned 2005; Hlavka 2014). Chris explains, however, that he was not actually afraid, instead referencing notions of men's unstoppable sex drive and/or propensity for violence. By rationalizing the scenario as his partner getting "carried away" by his gender role, he alludes to stereotypical, hegemonic notions of men as aggressive, sex-driven partners. He resolves the encounter by distracting the man, and eventually, they mutually give and receive oral sex, both of which he describes as unwanted.

Because sexual scripts were less clear, GBQ men did not always recognize when they had been assaulted. Alex below describes incapacitated sex with a man after leaving a bar.

*I have flash memories of this. Essentially, he had sex with me for hours in a gross basement. There was an element of, "I'm gay, you're gay, bodies are animals, this place is dirty, and this is sort of hot; we're both fucked up." . . . We didn't enter into the force of heteronormative power...we entered into some wilderness where it's like, "I can do anything to you because I found you on the street." That is more like what most gay men think of and fear when they go out...they'll meet some guy who takes them into a situation where there aren't rules. The lack of rules also means the lack of claims.*

–Alex, 20-year-old junior (questioning)

In a vivid account, Alex described entering an extreme space "where there are no rules." Whereas most men described not knowing what to do next because of less defined scripts, Alex references heteronormative power and the experience of being away from it, in a "wilderness" of sorts. His account suggests that queerness, as a minority identity, can exist outside the bounds of normative expectations. But without rules, it can become dangerous. Alex explained that he now considers this experience sexual assault. However, it took him years to make this claim because of his uncertainty as to whether this was a normal experience of casual sex.

Some GBQ men described overlaying a heterosexual script onto encounters whereby there is an expectation that the "top"—the more masculinized role relative to the feminized bottom—should have an orgasm. As a result, the pleasure of the bottom is not prioritized. This expectation for the top to orgasm encourages pressure to "finish what you started" or, at a minimum, give the partner an orgasm. Although this pressure is often documented in the heterosexual literature (Armstrong et al. 2012; Bogle 2008), it is interesting to see the orgasm imperative so easily transferred onto GBQ tops in a way that reproduces the gender binary and its normative expectations.

*You don't know how to say no, so you want it to end as quickly as possible. . . so you're going to do something to get them off. . . . If I get a guy to come, he's not going to be like, "Round 2, let me get in your butt." It's going to be like, "ugh finished," and then I can, like, go.*

–Jacob, 21-year-old senior (gay)

Like Jacob, respondents often referenced pressure to end sex by making their partner orgasm, and this was particularly true when the partner was a top or of perceived higher status. Men reported having receptive anal sex to "get it over with." Abdul said, for example, "I wanted him to shut up. . . . I wanted it to be over with." Across interviews, men described a powerlessness and devaluing of bottoms in sexual encounters. Some men described their partners (particularly when they were strangers) tagging them as a bottom even if they had not yet bottomed for them. This effectively gave license for the top to be "rough" and prioritize their own pleasure. As mentioned above, the majority of unwanted sexual events (14 of 18) involved bottoming. In some instances, the experience of being put into a submissive role could make the entire experience unwanted.

*Men are much more aggressive with me [than I want] when I bottom. I enjoy being dominant in both positions, but men just assume because you're bottoming that you want to be submissive.*

He was asked: Why do you think that is?

*Well, the role is just seen to be more passive because you're being penetrated. . . . we associate that with submissiveness and passiveness because you're not the one doing. You're being done.*

–Nickie, 21-year-old junior (gay)

When GBQ men were boxed in as bottoms, and thus viewed in feminine terms, some described feeling "locked in." This echoes the sentiments of women in unwanted heterosexual encounters, particularly notions of not wanting to be labeled "a tease" (Armstrong et al. 2006; Bogle 2008).

*As soon as I got to his place, I was like, "I wish I hadn't come here." Once I got there, he didn't even have to really do anything because I already felt like...locked in, you know. And I have the feeling sometimes. . . . "Of yeah, I've hooked up with a bunch of people. I'll just hook up with you."*

–Jack, 21-year-old senior (bisexual)

In addition to feeling trapped in a sexual encounter, this excerpt (and others) points to the impact of hookup culture. Jack suggests that his past sexual experience gives him little reason to decline sex here. This echoes the findings of Bogle (2008) and Wade (2017), in which the ubiquitous pressure to hook up can push students to have unwanted sex.

### **Markers of Men's Dominance**

Notable across GBQ men's interviews were calculations around masculinity and power. Before or during sex, victims of unwanted sex described using certain markers to determine who was more dominant, such that men felt (1) they had to go along with sex (sometimes to avoid violent escalation) and/or (2) that their

partner was "owed" sex because dominance is a form of approved masculinity. In such instances, physical size, perceived status, sexual role, and age could render one of the men relatively less powerful and thus more expected to submit to sex. Being a bottom was one instance of other dominance-indicating markers, like size and status.

Below, unwanted sex happens with a man (whom he meets on online) who is several years older.

*It could happen to anyone, but I think a lot of it has to do with size. Also, just age... being more dominant... I think with younger guys, it's more likely to happen because they don't know what's going on. I didn't know what was going on. Even now, I barely have a clue but more of a clue.*

–Taylor, 20-year-old junior (gay)

Taylor used notions of older age, larger size, and dominant status to account for the sex. Although he was not physically forced to have receptive anal sex, he recalled feeling manipulated by the situation. In his words, "younger" age and having "no clue" made him more vulnerable.

Below, Joe recalls unwanted sex during his sophomore year. In his account, a man "followed" him around the bar, asking for sex more than "20 times" before he finally gave in. He said in the interview that the event may have affected him more than he would like to admit.

*He was more muscular, stronger than me. Not to say he was holding me down, but at certain points, it was like that. It was like, "Please stop," and it didn't. ...It was weird in my mind that I was male and this was happening to me. You have this stereotypical view that it's usually a man and a woman. It was awkward for a stereotypical male to be powerless in the situation. I think that's what really made me think, "What's going on?" ...As a male in society, you don't know what to do.*

–Joe, 20-year-old junior (gay)

In this quote, Joe references the size and strength of this partner. He recalled asking him to "stop," but his requests were ignored—an action in line with rape. At some places in the interview, he suggests that this other man's size allowed him to be overpowered. Elsewhere, he said the man did not actually "hold him down." This suggests that size can represent power even when physical force is not exercised. Additionally, this respondent describes the "awkwardness" of feeling like a powerless man, pointing to the disorientation accompanying male powerlessness.

Below, Daniel describes unwanted sex during the summer before his freshman year.

*I was very scared. How do you get out of a situation like that? We were in his room. His parents weren't home. ... I remember thinking that if I had to call someone, they would have to come to his house, which was a big deal because*

*the whole thing was secret for me. If my parents knew, they would get more mad at me, specifically for being with him at his house, another conversation I wasn't ready to have. . . . I knew that if I didn't do this (sex), it would get worse."*

–Daniel, 19-year-old sophomore (gay)

Daniel described how difficult it would have been to escape the situation. At this point in time, his parents did not know he was gay. He described not only the physical isolation of his location but also its emotional isolation because he had not come out. This information gave his partner power over him. When Daniel could not imagine a clear exit, he had sex to avoid it getting "worse." Here, pressures of masculinity intersect with homophobia, wherein he seeks to avoid the social ramifications of calling someone for help, which would (1) identify him as a man who needs help and (2) identify him as gay. These things work together to facilitate an unwanted event.

Alex described unwanted sex during Thanksgiving break and his "closeted" friend physically forcing him to have sex. His description is full of references to power.

*He drove to my house to apologize for something...one thing led to another, it was eventually...I was physically forced to have sex with him and verbally berated into it. I don't think he saw it as forcible as much as he saw it as what he was "owed" . . .*

He was asked: Verbally berating? What was he saying?

*"We're already here. This is what you want to do. Why are your pants off if you don't want my dick in your ass," insulting my body, insulting me. He went from being really mean to me, to nicely apologizing, to laying into my insecurities when we were in the car. I had a poor body image in high school. . . . There are things I could have said in response to him, but he had so much authority, was taller and bigger than me by 100 pounds. There were moments where I was struggling and saying no, it didn't matter, to the point where I gave up.*

–Alex, 20-year-old junior (questioning)

Alex referenced the size, authority, and height of his partner. He recalled being insulted until he gave in emotionally and physically to sex. Elsewhere in the interview, Alex stated that because both men were closeted, they were equal in one sense because each did not want the other to expose them. Yet, power was leveraged in other ways through insults to his body and the use of shame and ridicule to obtain sex. These rights stemming from hegemonic masculinity norms (and the lack of rights for less masculine men) were often important for understanding why GBQ men went along with unwanted sex. That is, when male partners projected toxic or dangerous masculinity, this led some GBQ men to fear escalation. Embodiment of more subjugated masculinities, such as naivete, sexual inexperience, and lack

of confidence, in turn left some GBQ men with less sense of the right or ability to control interactions.

Overall, GBQ college men's accounts repeatedly highlight hierarchies of dominance in which age, perceived status, size, and sex role could leave one of the men with less embodied or perceived masculinity and thus less power and control. In some instances, male partners manage to obtain sex specifically through their markers of power, status, or masculinity—without threatening violence or demanding sex. These markers seem to imply that these men should be given sex and, in some instances, that they will expose the other man for being less dominant if they do not submit to sex. Moreover, our findings provide suggestive evidence that men may need to be interactionally put down in order for their male aggressors to establish that they deserve sex or for the victims to think it is "normal" to give sex. It seems worth noting here that because of gender inequality, it is possible that in heterosexual encounters, women are already relationally subordinate. However, in encounters between men, determining who is relationally subordinate becomes an important, interactional exercise, one that can facilitate unwanted sex.

### *Effects of Homophobia*

A final theme that emerged in interviews relates to how the stigma of a man having sex with a man—what we sometimes call homophobia—becomes manifest in sexual events. Some respondents were afraid of being "outed" because of internalized homophobia or the homophobia of friends, family, or society in general, which gave partners leverage over them. Other times, homophobia—and its related shame—made men's partners react violently toward them because of a perceived attack on their masculinity, which seemed to accompany same-gender sex. The stigma of being gay (or its potential) also pushed young men to have sex in secrecy, in remote locations, or with closeted people, who were sometimes more likely to use force or threats to obtain sex.

*Men who consider themselves "discrete" or "DL" [down low], in my experience, later would always come to remind me of the way the guy in high school acted. Emotions too volatile and on the surface. I don't know if at that point in time he understood what he was doing because of his own twisted identity issues.*

—Alex, 20-year-old junior (questioning)

Much like Alex, several men in our sample described encounters in which stigma or perceived discrimination caused a closeted man to act in particularly aggressive ways. After a few encounters with "DL" men, Alex now deliberately avoids these men. Sometimes, aggression was geared toward keeping the event a secret. Other times, it was more mired in "self-loathing."

One possible interpretation relates to the notion of challenged manhood. As previous scholarship indicates, men respond to masculinity threats by enacting stereotypical masculinity (e.g., Glick et al. 2007). Given that traditional notions of masculinity include being straight, in some accounts, men who had not come to terms with their nonheterosexual status acted in violent ways, behavior that could

be indicative of a perceived threat to their masculinity brought on by same-sex attraction.

For some men, stigma led them to search for sex in discrete settings or online.

*I met him via Craigslist. Context: Before I came out, I wanted to explore my sexuality. ... But something within me was very hesitant, so I didn't want anyone knowing. I even downloaded Grindr one time and was scared by how many people I knew. I was hesitant to use any of the apps even at a discrete level, so I turned to Craigslist because it was anonymous.*

–Taylor, 20-year-old junior (gay)

For Taylor, this search for discretion led to unwanted sex. Several men we interviewed took deliberate actions to make sure that sex was anonymous, away from friends. Sometimes, such efforts increased their risk of unwanted sex, although it decreased their chances of being outed.

Research shows that stigma operates at individual, intrapersonal, and structural levels (Hatzenbuehler 2009). Across interviews, some men had unwanted sex because of individual-level factors, such as personal shame or ambivalence. Others had it as a result of a fear of being outed, ridiculed, or physically hurt, which their partners evoked in interactions. More structural factors, such as broader homophobia, isolation, and dating markets, also encouraged unwanted sex.

*I don't know how he found out, but some guy found out I kind of like guys. So, we were hanging out, and he pressured me...joking at first, "I'm so horny dude," ...started pressuring me, "I know this; I will out you if you don't." What do I do? I'm in this situation alone with this guy, and I was so scared because my best friends didn't even know I was out. [I] felt like I had to do it, didn't want it, but it's gonna happen. [I] felt like it was out of control. ... I've gotta do this, get it over with.*

–Andre, 22-year-old graduate student (bisexual)

For Andre, it was an explicit threat to out him and the other people who might hear about the encounter that mattered. In this instance, his partner is effectively able to use information about his sexual orientation as blackmail to extract sex.

*There's such a stigma of being raped, and I don't want it to define me, so I don't think about it. ... It was harder being a male and having it happen to me. ... [I thought], what is my masculinity almost? It's something men don't talk about, could "never happen to a man." Once it happened to me, what does that make me? Not to be sexist, but I felt more like the woman even though we were two men. But I felt like... I was just this thing, like an object.*

–Daniel, 19-year-old sophomore (gay)

In a profound account from Daniel, victimhood is constructed as being incompatible with masculinity (Weiss 2010), and rape seems to align with femininity. As a

result of the dual stigma of being gay and powerless, Daniel has trouble processing the experience. Elsewhere in the interview, he told us that his parents knew he was experimenting but did not discuss it with him, heightening his vulnerability. In this way, stigma operates at multiple levels to remove any sort of space to safely explore sexuality.

## Discussion and Conclusion

In this article, we examine how unwanted sex occurs for GBQ men. Our findings suggest it is not only masculinity and homophobia but also a lack of clearly defined sexual scripts that lead some GBQ men to have unwanted sex. Markers of dominance—an accepted form of masculinity—also operate to make some GBQ men more likely to go along with (or be pressured into) unwanted sex because either (1) they perceive that their partners are more dominant, and therefore more deserving of sex, or (2) they fear partners may hurt them, “out” them, or insult them. Our findings suggest that men fear being overpowered, exposed, or ridiculed because these characteristics are equated with subordinate masculinities, an identity that many GBQ seek to avoid.

We will first discuss the absence of clear sexual scripts. In interviews, GBQ college men described a lack of familiarity with scripts that is necessary to safely navigate sex. Findings suggest that some learning of sexual scripts does occur. For instance, men described learning how to decipher signals with experience. Acquired experience, however, was not always enough to protect men from unwanted sex. Even GBQ men who reported high numbers of male partners described finding themselves in spaces where the expectations were unclear. In such instances, GBQ men went along with what was happening or relied on stereotypes. This sometimes involved using a script from pornography or assuming that sex was the default option in a community that is discursively framed as valuing sexual pleasure. Some men applied heteronormative scripts to two men whereby the more feminine man took on a woman’s gender role (i.e., had receptive sex and ensured their partner’s orgasm). In such instances, the gender binary—and its accompanying gender hierarchy—was reproduced in the context of two men. This lack of familiarity with sexual scripts also meant that GBQ men lacked a toolkit (e.g., refusal skills) for staying safe. In other words, GBQ men are less likely than women to identify “red flags,” as there are fewer interventions and cultural discourses aimed at protecting college men from sexual assault (Hirsch et al. 2019).

Our analysis has implications for how an absence of sexual scripts functions in interactions to produce unwanted sex. Sexual scripts dictate what is normal: what is allowable. Existing research shows that within a heterosexual hookup script, it is often presumed that it is acceptable for a man to take a woman to his room, provide drinks, and sometimes ask for sex repeatedly (Armstrong et al. 2006; Bogle 2008; Hirsch et al. 2019). However, it is not okay to threaten physical violence or reputational damage. Importantly, this script serves to keep the average man from engaging in sexual assault, although men may attempt to cajole and persuade women. Analogously for GBQ men, an absence of scripts left our respondents more vulnerable to unwanted sex. If there had been more of a script, it is possible that

GBQ men might have been able to refuse sex or call out male partners for acting inappropriately (e.g., for expecting sex in a "gross" basement or next to garbage dumpsters).

Our results also indicate a connection between masculine dominance and who "deserves" sex. GBQ men frequently described analyzing their partners' perceived and embodied masculinity during sexual encounters and using these to calculate who was "owed" sex. In contrast to heterosexual couples, in which gender inequality creates overt power imbalances, our findings suggest that more work goes into establishing power differences between men. However, similar to heterosexual sex, these power differences, once established, tended to map onto the roles of top and bottom so that the devaluation of a status like "bottom" generates power for the "top."

Layered onto pressures around masculinity, our results suggest that homophobia also works to facilitate unwanted sex for GBQ men. Specifically, closeted men reported acute pressure to continue unwanted sexual encounters in an effort to avoid being outed. For aggressors who were closeted themselves, not accepting their own nonheterosexual identity led to stereotypical masculine behaviors, such as aggression, bullying, and violence. Because of broader homophobia, some GBQ men sought discrete sexual experiences through Grindr or Craigslist. This search for discretion led some men into scenarios in which their isolation or uncertainty heightened vulnerability.

Findings also suggest that pressures around hookup culture may intersect with hegemonic masculinity standards. Specifically, hegemonic notions of men's sexual desire as constant, uncontrollable, and exploratory may combine with dominant scripts around hooking up to create pressure for GBQ men to accept all opportunities for sex. Although we found evidence that the norms around masculinity and casual sex may fuel unwanted sex for GBQ men, it is also true that there has been some regulation in heterosexual arenas (e.g., affirmative consent and sexual assault prevention) in recent years. Our results suggest that such regulation has not necessarily transferred into the gay space. As a result, GBQ men find themselves with fewer strategies for declining sex amid encounters lacking clear sexual scripts.

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